

## **IF YOU GIVE A MOUSE A COOKIE & Other Story Books**

(Amazing Grace, Borreguita & the Coyote, Imogene's Antlers, Martha Speaks, Math Curse, Owen)

### **Study Guide**

#### **Dear Teacher:**

We have created the following study guide to help make your students' theater experience with TheatreworksUSA's production of *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie & Other Story Books* as meaningful as possible. For many, it will be their first time viewing a live theatrical production. We have learned that when teachers discuss the play with their students before and after the production, the experience is more significant and long-lasting.

This performance highlights seven favorite children's books. The format is that of a musical revue made up of vignettes created by a variety of talented writers and performed by a cast of six actors. (Note: the actors assume various roles throughout the show through quick costume and character changes -- a concept which you may need to review for younger children).

Following is an alphabetical list of the books used in the performance. You may choose to read some (or all) of the books to your class either before or after seeing the performance (perhaps asking students which books from the show they would like to read). Similarly, depending on the grade level of your students and the time you have available, you can utilize the activities either before seeing the show (as pre-performance preparation) or as follow-up activities.

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#### **AMAZING GRACE**

*by Mary Hoffman (Adapted by Kirsten Childs)  
Published by Penguin US © 1991*

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**Summary:** Although classmates say that she cannot play Peter Pan in the school play because she is a girl and has black skin, Grace discovers, with help from Nana, that she can do anything she sets her mind to do.

**Theme:** You can be anything you want to be, if you believe in yourself.

- Introduce the word "stereotype" and talk about how stereotyping could have prevented Grace from playing Peter Pan. Discuss situations familiar to students in which stereotypes have been broken.
- Brainstorm a list of occupations. As students suggest items, discuss the possibility that both women and men may occupy the jobs. Use inclusive language as you write the list, e.g., flight attendant instead of stewardess, police officer rather than policeman, food server instead of waiter or waitress, etc. Have students select an occupation from the list that interests them and research that career. Encourage them to use both print and non-print resources. Invite any family members or friends of students in those occupations into the classroom to talk about their work.
- Based on the list students generated above, make a bulletin board of careers. Have students search magazines, advertising flyers, and newspapers for pictures and articles about people in these occupations.
- Remind students that they grow and change and learn new things constantly. Discuss things they could not do when they were smaller that they can now do. Have them make "I Can" books. On each page, they draw a picture of something they can do and complete the sentence frame, "I can

\_\_\_\_\_." Bind the pages with a metal ring. On the back cover of the book, have students make a list of things they would still like to learn or be able to do. As they master items on the list, have them add a page to the book. Provide opportunities for students to celebrate each other's accomplishments as they watch the books grow.

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### ***BORREGUITA AND THE COYOTE***

by Verna Aardema (Adapted by Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx)

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**Summary:** In this retelling of a Mexican folk tale, a little lamb, or *borreguita*, uses her wits to escape a hungry coyote.

**Theme:** Music, art, stories, and language can reflect culture... in this case, the culture of a Mexican American community.

- O Discuss with the students how it could be possible that a lamb, an animal that is smaller and weaker than a coyote, was able to save herself from being eaten.
- O Begin a glossary of Spanish words, starting with those heard and/or read in the story. Add familiar words such as color and number words, people and animal words, and common phrases. Keep the glossary in a place it can be added to as students learn new words. Use Spanish words and phrases routinely in the classroom.
- O Discuss the meaning of "folktale" and distinguish this as a type of literature. Have students identify other folktales they have heard (*Examples: Anansi the Spider, Brer Rabbit, Grimms' Fairy Tales, etc.*) Locate Mexico on a map as the source of *Borreguita and the Coyote*.
- O Explore the question, "In what ways can we tell stories besides reading them in books?" Identify art and music as two ways. Show the class photos of paintings or murals that tell a story and discuss them with the class. Listen to songs which tell a story and listen to and/or sing some of them. Discuss the story elements in the songs.

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### ***IF YOU GIVE A MOUSE A COOKIE***

by Laura Joffe Numeroff (Adapted by Jeremy Desmon and Patrick Dwyer)

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**Summary:** When a hungry mouse asks a boy to share his cookies, a chain of events begins: after the mouse eats the cookie, he needs milk (to wash the cookie down), and then a mirror (to make sure he doesn't have a milk mustache), and then some scissors (while looking at the mirror, he noticed his hair was askew), and then a broom (to sweep up his cut hair), and then a nap. When he wakes up, he wants another cookie. And the whole cycle repeats again.

**Theme:** A single small request can lead to a nearly endless series of other requests.

- O Introduce the concept of "cause-and-effect" (also known as "if-then" statements). For example: IF you give a mouse a cookie, THEN he'll ask you for some milk. Have your students ever been told "If you finish your chores (or eat all your supper, or complete your homework, etc.) then you can..."? What happened when they didn't finish their chores, etc.? (ie: consequence)
- O While reading the book to your students, ask them to predict what will happen next, as a result of the mouse's requests. You can repeat this activity with the other books in the series, including *If You Give a Pig a Pancake, If You Give a Moose a Muffin, If You Take a Mouse to School, etc.*

- O Illustrate the idea of a chain reaction by using dominos, set up in a line on their ends. What do students think will happen when you knock over the first domino?
- O Create an original cause-and-effect story based on this book with your students' input. For example: If you give a bear some honey, a student may respond that his fingers will get sticky. The next student can add that because his fingers are sticky, he'll need to wash them in the river. The following student may say that because his hands are wet, he'll need a towel to dry them off... Etc. Each student can then write the statement down, and draw an accompanying illustration. You can then have the pages bound as a book or display them in order around the classroom.
- O Have your class create a "human machine" to further emphasize cause-and-effect. The first student may continuously touch his/her toes. The next student may put his/her hand on the first student's back and whenever the first student touches his toes, the second student may raise her arms. The next student may hold the second student's hand and whenever her arm is raised, the third student may tap his foot. And so on until all members of the class are moving, all because of the first student's action. Encourage each student to invent their own unique action.

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### ***IMOGENE'S ANTLERS***

*by David Small (Adapted by Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx)*

*Published by Random House Children's Books, a division of Random House, Inc.*

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**Summary:** Imogene is surprised when she wakes up with a pair of antlers growing out of her head! Her worried parents enlist the help of the family doctor and the school principals, but no one is able to resolve their dilemma. Imogene, however, thinks the antlers are "cool", and makes the best of it by finding practical uses for them (for instance, they make a wonderful clothes dryer) until they disappear on their own (only to be replaced by another animal characteristic.....).

**Theme:** Animals, like people, come in different sizes, shapes, and colors; and these differences make each of them unique.

- O Before seeing the show or reading the book, if possible, discuss what it would be like to wake up some morning with an elephant's trunk or a camel's hump or some other animal characteristic. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of having this new feature? Ask students what animal characteristic they would like to have if they could.
- O If you decide to read the book before seeing the performance, stop before the very end (when Imogene wakes up with peacock feathers to replace her antlers). Have the class brainstorm endings to the story -- what else might Imogene wake up with on the day after her antlers have disappeared? After the show, ask students if they were surprised by the appearance of Imogene's peacock feathers! (Or, if you hadn't read the book before the show, do this brainstorming activity afterwards, asking students what other animal attribute Imogene might have acquired).
- O Give each student an outline drawing of a set of antlers (make sure they have several "branches"). Have students draw how they would use the antlers and display the pictures under the heading, "Here's How WE Would Use Imogene's Antlers!"
- O Have students make a mural depicting a parade of animals headed for the library. (At one end of the mural, draw the library, or draw a sign saying "To the Library.") Have each student draw a picture of an animal (perhaps by drawing animal names out of a hat) and glue it onto the background in a single file line. Leave space above each animal's head for a word balloon, and have students write the title of a book that their animal might enjoy (for example, a dog might want *Martha Speaks*, a lamb might want *Borreguita and the Coyote*, a deer might enjoy *Imogene's Antlers*).

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## **MARTHA SPEAKS**

by Susan Meddaugh (Adapted by Arthur Perlman and Jeffrey Lunden)  
Published by Houghton Mifflin Company, Copyright © 1997 by Susan Meddaugh

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**Summary:** When the family dog, Martha, eats alphabet soup, the letters in the soup go up to her brain instead of down to her stomach, and she learns to speak! Although it's fun at first, after a while, Martha drives her human family crazy with her nonstop chatter. All is forgiven, however, when her gift of gab saves their house from a robbery.

**Theme:** Dogs are terrific companions with their unique characteristics and talents.

- Brainstorm a variety of ways in which animals communicate with people, such as using different "voices" (barking, growling, purring, meowing), and body language (wagging tails, scratching).
- Explore the "What if..." notion that if animals could talk, what might they tell us? Use different groups of animals for this discussion, such as farm animals, zoo animals, rain forest animals, desert animals, and others. Students would also likely want to imagine that their own pets could talk.
- Have students write and then role play a segment for the evening news in which Martha is interviewed by a reporter about thwarting the burglar.
- Do some creative brainstorming in response to: What would Martha eat in order to be able to solve a math problem, perform a science experiment, or create a work of art? Choose one of the generated ideas and write and illustrate a class book.

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## **MATH CURSE**

by Jon Scieszka (Adapted by Mindi Dickstein and Daniel Messé)  
Published by Viking Children's Books

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**Summary:** When the teacher tells her class that they can think of almost everything as a math problem, one student develops a math anxiety; it becomes a real "curse" when she is seemingly bombarded with math wherever she goes! The curse is finally broken when she discovers that she can solve any math problem.

**Theme:** Math is such an integral part of our lives that we often don't realize that we're using it. Chaos may result, however, when we forget how much math can help us.

- Before seeing the performance, if possible, ask students the question, "Where have you used math today?" Make a list of their responses on the board. After they have seen the performance, add any new examples to the list that they remember from the play.
- Before seeing the play, if possible, have students identify some occupations that require the use of math, discussing how and why workers in these jobs use math. What would happen if they were not able to use math in their jobs? (Example: If a baker would not be able to measure ingredients, their cakes wouldn't come out right.)
- The original book, *Math Curse*, and the song heard in the play both contain a great deal of math vocabulary. Before students see either one, brainstorm a list of math terms and have students arrive at definitions for them (helping them along if they're younger). After they have read the book and/or seen the performance, they can add many more math vocabulary words to the list.

- O Have students take an inventory of ways in which math is used in the operation of the school (not including math classes). Send pairs or small groups of students to interview school personnel (such as the nurse, secretary, custodian, principal, physical education teacher, music teacher, librarian/media specialist) about the parts of their work that use math in some way. Bring the results back to the classroom and record the results.

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**OWEN**

*by Kevin Henkes (Adapted by Faye Greenberg and David Evans)*

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**Summary:** Owen is a little mouse who can't bear to part with his beloved yellow blanket, Fuzzy. When he's about to start school, his parents must come up with a way to help him leave his blanket at home. Just when it seems that all of their efforts will fail, his understanding mother provides a solution: she makes handkerchiefs out of "Fuzzy," so that Owen can always have a little piece of it with him, but won't be embarrassed.

**Theme:** Growing up may involve some painful changes.

- O Before seeing the show, if possible, have students relate personal stories about objects to which they have had a strong attachment, such as a blanket, a stuffed toy, pillow, etc. Did this object have a name? Do they still have it? If not, what happened to it?
- O Ask students to recall their first day of school. What feelings do they remember having (excited, scared, etc.)? What do they remember about that day? (Saying goodbye to their family, meeting the new teacher, their classroom, etc.)
- O Have students write and illustrate an autobiography of their lives before they came to school. As a group, brainstorm the questions they should answer in their autobiography (for example, where they lived, what they liked to do, who their friends were, who was in their family, preschool experiences, etc.). Invite them to interview their parents if they cannot remember the details. Place the autobiographies in the classroom library.
- O Have students brainstorm a list of things they used to do when they were younger that they have now outgrown. Balance this list with a second list of things that can do now that they could not do when they were younger. Encourage them to talk about their feelings as they were "growing up." For example, in what ways were their "younger" child activities and habits hard to give up? What new challenges did new activities bring? What had to happen in order for them to do "older" child activities (such as grow taller, become physically stronger, learn a new skill, etc.)

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**THE CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL - Website: [www.cbcbooks.org](http://www.cbcbooks.org)**

This website contains general reading activities, plus suggestions on how to celebrate National Children's Book Week (each November) in your school, library, and/or community. You can also call them at their toll-free phone number: **1-800-999-2160**

**READING IS FUNDAMENTAL, INC. (RIF) - Website: [www.rif.org](http://www.rif.org)**

Contact this organization to find out how you can help to promote reading in your community or classroom. Their website also offers a wealth of information and activities on reading. They can also be reached via their toll-free phone number: **1-(877) RIF-READ (877-743-7323)**