

CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE



If You Give a Cat a Cupcake

Dear Educators –

Thank you for choosing the Omaha Theater Company! In addition to presenting great shows, we strive to make the theatrical experience both meaningful and educational to the youth in our audience. This study guide has been created to help identify the themes and lessons from the *If You Give a Cat a Cupcake* and move them into your classroom where they can be further developed through discussions, activities and assignments. Please feel free to take the ideas we're suggesting here and modify them to match your classroom's grade level and curriculum.

Sincerely,

Brian Guehring, Omaha Theater Company Education Director



Take A Look Inside!

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Pre-Show Activities

Getting Sidetracked

Out-of-chair activity • 5-10 minutes

Objective: To explore the concept of being distracted through the game of telephone

Research: Read *If You Give A Cat A Cupcake*. What starts out as a simple snack soon turns into a whirlwind adventure to the beach, the gym, and the museum.

Activity: Have the students play a game of telephone with lines from the book to demonstrate how easy it is to get “sidetracked.” Ask the students to sit in a circle. Come up with a short message that is whispered into one student’s ear. That student then passes the message on to his neighbor and so on around the circle. Have the final student say out loud the message that they heard. Then, have the first student repeat the message they heard.

Discussion: Ask the class why they think mistakes happened? What are ways in which they could improve their end result?

Extension: Play another round and see if the class can pass the message more accurately.

Variation: Play pantomime telephone. Line the students up in a row all facing one direction. The student at the back of the line starts the game by pantomiming to the student ahead of him a specific job such as lifeguard, janitor or baker. The rest of the line continues to face the opposite direction. When the student observing the pantomime thinks he understands the specific job being communicated, he should turn around and tap the shoulder of the student in front of him. That student then turns around in order to observe the pantomime of the student who thinks that he just figured it out! This sequence continues down the line.

Behind the Scenes Spotlight

An interview with Omaha Theater Company's Resident Playwright, Brian Guehring

If You Give a Cat a Cupcake

Artistic Credits

Playwright Brian Guehring
Director James Larson
Costume Designer Sherri Geerdes
Set Designer Mark Parrott

Cast

Cat Miriam Gutierrez
Laura Stephanie Jacobson
Other Roles Michael Harrelson

Why did you choose this book to adapt into a play?

It's a popular book for teachers, parents and children. We did a production of *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* a few years ago, and it was so successful we wanted to do another one.

What was the biggest challenge of this project?

The biggest challenge was taking a short book and turning it into a full play. I had to use my imagination to answer all sorts of questions about who the characters were, and I had to create new characters, too.

What has been your favorite playwriting project?

One of my favorite projects was writing *The Adventures of Pyramid Man and Dr. Nutrition*. It is an original play that uses superheroes and super villains to teach kids about healthy eating. I love superheroes and had fun creating new characters and villains.

What other plays have you written?

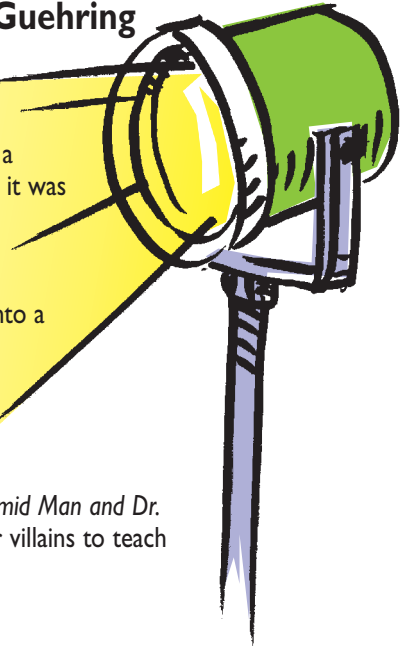
I have adapted the books *The Giver*, *Where the Red Fern Grows*, *Old Yeller*, *Miss Bindergarten*, and *Julie of the Wolves*. I have also written new plays *Sacagawea: Discovering History*, *The Brave Little Tailor*, *The True Tall Tales of Pecos Bill*, *Nebraskaland: The New Nebraska History* Themepark, and *The Bully Show*.

What education did you receive for your career?

I studied theater in college. While at Duke, I studied playwriting, acting, and light design. Then, I earned a graduate degree from University of Texas at Austin where I studied teaching, acting, directing and playwriting for young audiences.

What types of new projects are you working on?

I am still revising and improving the script for *If You Give a Cat a Cupcake*. I'll keep working on the script even after our production, because it will then go on a national tour. I am working with a theater in Washington D.C. to do a new production of *The Adventures of Pyramid Man and Dr. Nutrition*. I am also starting my first book for young audiences.



Looking at the Job of a Playwright

In-chair activity • 10-20 minutes

Objective: To introduce students to playwriting by adapting a page from the book into a page of a play.

Discussion: What can you do in a book that you can't do on stage? How is a play different from a movie?

Research: Read a few pages of *If You Give A Cat A Cupcake*. Identify the dialogue, characters, and when and where the scene or scenes take place.

Modeling: Choose one page from the book and discuss how it might be dramatized on stage. Ask for volunteers to come in front of the class to make a "picture" of a scene from this page using frozen statues of the characters. Have each statue say one thing that their character would say.

Activity: Split the students into small groups and have them choose one to two different pages from the book (or assign the pages). Ask each group to adapt the pages into two pictures of frozen statues: one statue of the cause, the other a statue of the effect.

Side Coaching: Focus on the dialogue. How does your character feel about the other characters? How can you make your body more like your character's body? How would your feet, neck, back, elbows, fingers, and eyes look?

Discussion: What do you think would be the hardest scene to put on stage? What might you have done differently with the script than the playwright did?

Post-Show Activities

These activities are designed to help students further explore themes from the show through discussions, drama, art and writing.

Snapshot

Out-of-chair activity • 10-15 minutes

Objective: To challenge students to use their imaginations and to work together to create a frozen picture or snapshot of a silly situation.

Vocabulary: Statue: A sculpture of a person or animal that is carved out of stone or wood (if we are making one with our bodies they do not move.). Snapshot: A moment captured by a camera.

Modeling: Ask a group of three to four students to come to the front of the room and create a statue of one of the situations listed below. Ask them to create the environment with their bodies and to show the class how they are holding or using the object.

- A cat, the beach, a frying pan
- A giraffe, the North Pole, a stapler
- A crocodile, the library, and golf club

Activity: Clear a space so there is room to move. Divide the class into groups of four to five students and spread them out around the room. The instructor is to call out a random place, a random object, and a random animal. The students then use all members of their group to create a frozen picture of this situation, using the object, interacting with the animal, and experiencing the environment. Look at each group's snapshot.

Side Coaching: Show us how you use the object. How do we know what kind of animal you are? Show us in your shoulders, knees, feet and face.

Extension: Give each group secret instructions for their snapshot and have the rest of the class try to guess the three categories the group is representing.

Day in the Life

Out-of-chair activity • 10–20 minutes

Objective: Students will use their acting tools to kinesthetically explore a “day in the life” of a character that the Cat and Laura encountered on their journey.

Brainstorming: As a class, make a list of the different characters in the play.

Discussion: How did the actors change their bodies and voices to become the characters in the show?

Research: Have the students research one of the characters they want to act out. What would they eat? How do they move? What noises do they make? How would they speak? How do they sleep? Are they energetic or shy?

Activity: Students should find an open space in the room where they can stand by themselves. Have them begin the activity by lying down and pretending to sleep as their character before waking up and moving around the room. Periodically instruct the students to change activities. Students should pretend to eat breakfast, get ready for the day, play with friends, do work, eat dinner, and go to bed, as their character would do. Freeze the actors every once in awhile to ask a question to a specific student or to hear what each character is thinking.

Side-Coaching: Teachers can use the following questions to guide students through their experiences. What are you dreaming about? What is for breakfast? What do you do if it rains? Do have friends? Are you scared of the other characters? What games do you play?

Extension: After exploring the characters, set up chairs to interview the characters they created.

Where Are They?

In-chair and out-of-chair activity • 10-20 minutes

Objective: To create a set for *If You Give A Cat A Cupcake* through visual art and with the students' bodies.

Definition: A set designer is a theater artist who draws what the scenery will look like for a play.

Supplies: Paper, pencils, drawing utensils

Discussion: As a class, brainstorm all the different locations that take place in the story: living room, gym, kitchen, etc. What were your favorite parts of the set from the show?

Research: Have each student research one location from the play and find pictures of different examples of that environment. What items might be found there?

Activity: Split the students into small groups and ask them to use their bodies to create statues of the locations. Share them with the class. You can even let the other students guess what scene the statue is from! For example, a group could create a mountain by standing in levels and creating stair/steps. Others can create pine trees or boulders with their bodies.

Art Activity: Ask students to draw one scene design of their choice on a piece of paper. What elements from the play or story would they incorporate? Which items would they leave out? Ask the students to be as specific as possible.

Fill In The Blanks

In-chair activity • 20 minutes

Objective: To introduce concepts of story writing that encourage students to use their imaginations to create new scenarios similar to those found in the story.

Materials: Paper and pencil

Activity: Have the students fill in the blanks to the following phrase from the story. “If you give a _____ a _____, he or she will probably want a _____ to go with it.” The students may choose any animal and subject matter, but the two components of the sentence need to correspond. The students may continue filling in the blanks in this sentence (three to four times) to create a series of events, just like in the book. Gather as a class and have each person share their story.

Discussion: Discuss the series of consequences they created. The mouse wants a glass of milk with his cookie. The cat wants sprinkles on his cupcake. Whatever you give the animal, what they want needs to follow a similar theme. Does everything relate? If not, have the class brainstorm other ideas that might make the story more cohesive.

Extension: Have the students work with a partner turn their stories into a short play!

If You Give a Cat a Cupcake

Please
feel free to
contact the
cast!

Letters may be written to:
If You Give a Cat a Cupcake
Omaha Theater Company
2001 Farnam Street
Omaha, NE 68102

Please send letters,
questions and comments
to:
Brian Guehring at
briang@rosetheater.org

Resources for Students and Teachers

Books

If you enjoyed *If You Give a Cat a Cupcake*, you may want to consider reading some of the other books written by Laura Numeroff and illustrated by Felicia Bond.

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie (HarperCollins)

If You Give a Moose a Muffin (HarperCollins)

If You Give a Pig a Pancake (HarperCollins)

The Chicken Sisters (HarperCollins)

Monster Munchies (Random House)

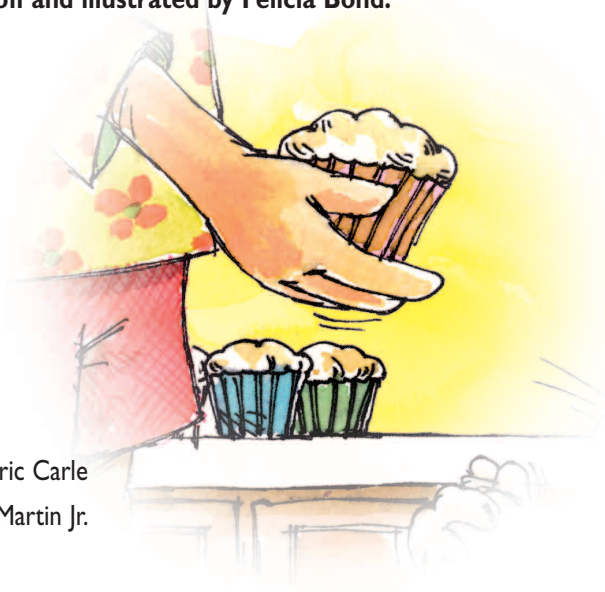
You might also enjoy the following books:

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak

Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown

The Very Hungry Caterpillar and Other Stories by Eric Carle

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin Jr.



Web Sites

Additional information and activities can be found at the following sites:

www.mousecookiebooks.com/play.asp

www.lauranumeroff.com/media/CatCupcake_Decorate.pdf

Omaha Theater Company Workshops

Pre-Show Acting Workshops (For Pre-K - 4th Grade)

This one-hour interactive workshop features creative drama activities, exploration of our basic acting tools (body, voice and imagination), a review of basic theater etiquette and short scene development.

Intro to Theater Workshops (For 2nd – 6th Grade)

This hands-on workshop will introduce students to acting, design, directing and playwriting. Students will also explore the set, costumes and make-up design from the show.

Intro to Musical Theater (For 4th – 12th Grade)

Students participating in this interactive workshop will learn the basics of singing, acting, and musical theater dancing.

To book a workshop, please contact James Larson, Omaha Theater Company Artistic Director at (402) 502-4618 or jamesl@rosetheater.org. For additional information about the workshops, contact Carla Podraza, Omaha Theater Company Tour Coordinator at (402) 502-4626 or carlap@rosetheater.org.

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