

LEARNING LINKS

Monkey Baa Theatre Company: I Am Jack

MONDAY
OCTOBER 5 2015
11 AM
TUESDAY
OCTOBER 6 2015
9:30 AM & 11:30 AM

2015 > 2016

BROADEN THE HORIZONS
OF YOUR CLASSROOM.
EXPERIENCE THE VIBRANT
WORLD OF THE ARTS
AT THE McCALLUM!



McCallum Theatre Institute
Field Trip Series



McCALLUM THEATRE INSTITUTE
PRESENTS

Monkey Baa Theatre Company: I Am Jack

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“When you’re being
bullied you feel like
the loneliest person
on the planet.”

Sandra Eldridge • Director

Connecting to Curriculum and Students’ Lives!

ARTS • Theater, music, language arts

STUDENT’S LIVES • Bullying, coping strategies

Expanding the Concept of Literacy

What is a “text”? We invite you to consider the performances on McCallum’s Field Trip Series as non-print texts available for study and investigation by your students. Anyone who has shown a filmed version of a play in their classroom, used a website as companion to a textbook, or asked students to do online research already knows that “texts” don’t begin and end with textbooks, novels, and reading packets. They extend to videos, websites, games, plays, concerts, dances, radio programs, and a number of other non-print texts that students and teachers engage with on a regular basis.

We know that when we expand our definition of texts to the variety of media that we use in our everyday lives, we broaden the materials and concepts we have at our disposal in the classroom, increase student engagement, and enrich learning experiences.

Please consider how utilizing your McCallum performance as a text might align to standards established for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language.

How do we help students to use these texts as a way of shaping ideas and understanding the world?

Please use this material to help you on this journey.

NON-PRINT TEXT • any medium/text that creates meaning through sound or images or both, such as symbols, words, songs, speeches, pictures, and illustrations not in traditional print form including those seen on computers, films, and in the environment.

The Work of Art

A Non-print Text for Study

- What's it made of? How can this work serve as a *Common Core State Standards*-mandated "text" for student study in the classroom?



One-man (and one-woman!) shows are a staple of contemporary theater. Think of Julie Harris as Emily Dickinson in *The Belle of Amherst* or Hal Holbrook as Mark Twain. In *I Am Jack*, actor David Hynes adds his name to that list, as he embodies and gives voice to Jack, a little boy who finds himself at the mercy of schoolyard bullies. As it happens, this mature thespian from Australia also plays a host of other characters who figure into Jack's saga, including but not limited to, Jack's mum, her boyfriend, his best friends Chris and Paul, his almost-best friend Anna, the bully, and Jack's teacher, Mr. Angelou. And Jack himself? Well, he's an engaging – and intelligent – eleven-year-old with a good sense of humor who finds himself as the result of an off the cuff comment during a baseball competition the subject of some pretty intense bullying. In fact, he is no longer feeling very safe, and although he tries broaching the subject with both his mum and his teacher, neither of them picks up on what's going on. For one thing, Jack's mother's boyfriend Rob is poised to move in with them, drawing her attention in that direction, and leaving the boy feeling a bit as if his place at home were being usurped. Mr. Angelou, too, while a sympathetic soul, is rather too busy with all the demands of being a teacher (!) to notice Jack's dilemma. Still, Jack is too bright and too resourceful to remain a victim for long. His growing interest in photography provides him with an artistic outlet for his feelings and thoughts – and he runs with it.

While the thought of an adult man inhabiting the role of a youngster is perhaps not the most obvious of choices, clearly Monkey Baa Theatre is onto something here. The skill, which this seasoned professional fills out his roles, interweaving deft timing, disciplined physicality, and range of vocal qualities, imbues his performance with vulnerability and warmth. All of the action of the play unfolds within the four walls of Jack's bedroom. It's a typical kid's space. Furniture is sketched out in marker-like scribbles. Joke books, science projects, photographic equipment, and other detritus of an eleven-year-old's life clutter the room, providing a visual component that seems right in line with the jumble in Jack's brain. He's even able to project some of his photographic images on the walls, and the actor makes the most of comic moments like when his grandmum Nanna plays cards with him and takes an eternity each time it's her turn. From such moments, however, the action rapidly switches to things of a darker nature. Jack gets beaten by a cricket bat, and boys spit on him in the showers. Even as he relates these events, we feel our guts tighten. His two best friends, Chris and Paul, desert him at his hour of crisis. Not so, however, his almost best friend Anna, who takes matters into her own surprising hands. Ultimately the school principal declares: 'You won't be alone, we'll fight this together.' Contrary to expectations, the main bully isn't expelled, but Jack is able to take a couple of days off from school, which allows enough time for him to make himself useful at home and have a heart-to-heart talk with mum. When he returns to class, he and his tormentor are teamed up, and in the process Jack discovers that the boy can't read very well and begins to develop greater understanding of him and his behavior.

Now, you might suppose that a single actor on a solitary set might begin to feel a little restrictive. Actually, with the simplest of lighting changes, we – in our imaginations – visit soccer field, beach, and classroom – while never actually leaving Jack’s bedroom. So strong is the power of suggestion, that often in performance, as Jack “sees” a giant washed-up jellyfish on the beach, half the audience will rise from their seats to get a better look at the stage floor, so convinced are they by the actor’s spell.

The Artists

• Who has *produced* this text for study?



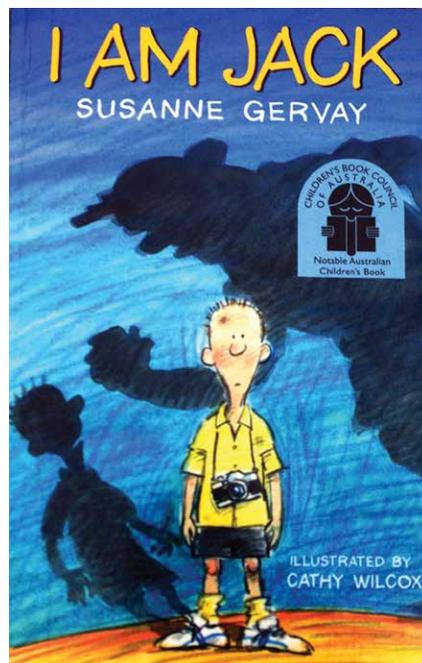
The story of Jack flowed initially from the pen of writer Susanne Gervay. With a number of well-regarded titles for youngsters under her belt, Ms. Gervay is a product of a Hungarian background. Her parents, refugees from the political turmoil of the mid-twentieth century in Eastern Europe, sought and received safe haven on the distant shores of that great country down under, Australia. Her first career was that of classroom instructor. Writing, as a vocation, came later. Asked what led her in the latter direction, she says, “I didn’t know I was going to be an author. I just wrote because I had to. Being an author is wonderful, as through books and talks I can reach readers of all ages. I’m inspired by my two kids, my family, and people around me as well as events that touch me emotionally.” She goes on to explain the genesis of this particular tale: “I wrote *I Am Jack* when my son Jack was bullied at school. Telling the story of how he tried to survive and how he began to lose his belief in himself. He eventually won against bullying with support of his Nanna and family, his friends, a teacher and the school. He found that the world could be fair and he could be himself again. It’s a funny, quirky, warm story about Jack and all of us. I remember the time [too, when] I was afraid to go to school because ‘the gang’ surrounded me and stole my lunch. No one played with me. It was lonely and scary. I didn’t feel I could ask my parents for help. They were both working so hard and tired all the time, so how could I bother them?” In explaining how her story came to be picked up by a theater company, she adds, “*I Am Jack* was published in 2000 and through word of mouth seeped into homes, libraries, schools and the hearts of children and their families. Finally it seeped onto the shelves of Monkey Baa Theatre Company. It took a long time before the wonderful creative directors read *Jack*. All three creative directors had to love the book to go ahead. The book had to also fit in with their programming. They were looking to expand their repertoire with a one-man show. All the stars were aligned when the offer arrived for *I Am Jack* to become that one-man show.” Finally she talks just a bit about the process of adaptation from story format to a theatrical one. A process she is candid to say she played little direct role in. “The creative directors of Monkey Baa are experienced at adaptation. They understand theater space and performance and I trusted them to do the adaptation. It was a particularly complex adaptation because a one-man show challenges every aspect of the play, from the set, technical design and multiple changes of characters. Eva DiCesare, Sandra Eldridge and Tim McGarry did the wonderful adaptation. Playwright Caleb Lewis was the dramaturge and helped develop the final script. I was consulted in the development of the script and my comments incorporated in the process. Everyone involved in the theater are trained at Australia’s most prestigious universities/colleges such as NIDA and WAAPA. The actors that perform in all their plays are professionally trained. Monkey Baa treated my work with great respect, asking me throughout the process if I was all right with their work. There is one important piece of advice I have – once you trust the theater company, then you have the courage to let them adapt it for the stage. It will be different in parts and that is all right.”

Speaking more generally, she offers these thoughts on her background: "It's wonderful speaking all over the world at conferences and festivals ranging from the Bologna Book Fair to Beijing, Ubud, Goa and Kiribati about my writing. My background includes a BA (University of Sydney), Diploma of Education (Advanced College of Education Victoria), MEd (University of NSW) and an MA (University of Technology Sydney). I'm a mum of two kids, a specialist in child growth and development, a speaker, journalist, creative director of The Hughenden Boutique Hotel, and of course a writer."

Monkey Baa itself was founded in 1997 and reincorporated in 2005. Their mission statement reads: "To create and produce exceptional quality theater performances and programs for young people and their families, teachers and communities throughout Australia and internationally." And do they ever! In just these few short years, they've adapted, produced and toured twelve new works by Australian writers – and featured work by two others. They count among their accolades the 2007 Helpmann Award (the equivalent in Australia of our Tony Awards) for Best Children's Presentation, the 2007 Drover for Touring Excellence and the 2006 Drover for Audience Development. The company has a brand spanking new facility in Sydney, and they have laid out their thoughts for the future in this vision statement: "To be one of Australia's most inspiring and engaging young people's theater companies, creating vibrant, thought provoking and entertaining theater of exceptional quality; work which drives our artists to strive for excellence, tells great Australian stories and provides our young audiences with a challenging and stimulating theatrical experience, that invites them to question, to connect and to encourage a greater understanding of the world and their place within it."

A graduate of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, actor David Hynes has enjoyed a long and prolific career as an actor. He's done a fair amount of classical work, Shakespearean plays like *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, as well as Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. The list of television credits is also substantial. For Monkey Baa, David's previous work includes *Sprung!*

When it comes to the piece currently under consideration, Hynes finds special value in the play's social commentary. "It's an important story to tell." Of Jack, the main character whose confidence erodes as he endures bullying at the hands of a fellow student, he says, "He's a funny, smart kid but school becomes a frightening place for him."



“I love being an author because I can share my imagination, thoughts, experimentation with words and create new meanings.”

Susanne Gervay

When he was young, Hynes worked as a dairy farmer. “I grew up on the farm up to my knees in muck in Bunbury in Western Australia.” It was during this experience that he observed some of the same traits of bullying among animals as exist in people. “Cows and chickens bully as well, and tend to gang up on weak animals.”

Returning to the subject of the play itself, he says, “A lot of [the play] happens inside Jack’s head. That’s important...because when you’re bullied you really feel isolated, like you’re in your own world.” In the course of the play, Jack’s mother discovers what is going on. “From then on he’s released. She tells the people at school and they help find a solution for Jack. The most important lesson he learns is that he is not alone and that calling for help does work. It turns out that the bully has a learning disability and that is something that happens a lot — people who are insecure can lash out at others to take the attention away from them.”

When the conversation turns to craft, Hynes reveals that he thrives on the challenges posed by playing every character in the play. “For an actor, it’s a real gift. You’ve got all these characters: different ages and different genders; the nanna, the mum, the teacher, the bully and all the friends as well.”

Director Sandra Eldridge has something to add:

“I was bullied as a kid. I can’t remember bullying anyone myself but I can recall going along with the others, standing by whilst someone was called horrible names. I still feel bad about that, doing nothing. Later as a teenager I did stand up for someone and I’m glad I did. When you’re being bullied you feel like the loneliest person on the planet and you seek out a safe place to be. We tried to recognize this in the staging of *I Am Jack* by setting Susanne’s poignant and important story in Jack’s bedroom and yet the room is a raft lost at sea, alone in the blackness of the surrounding stage. We scribbled all over the furniture to depict how Jack was feeling and we used a bright palette to show aspects of his personality, bold and sunny, a joke teller, with a beautiful heart and mind. In keeping with the book we set the play in a pre-digital era so that it wouldn’t date as technology is moving so fast. We did wonder whether to add cyberbullying but we decided that bullying is bullying no matter what or where its platform is. My hope is that one day the issue of bullying becomes something of the past. We as humans can learn as a species to care for one another with greater empathy, to celebrate and even nurture our differences and to STAND UP as a whole if someone is picked out and picked on. We can do this and Jack’s story helps us by beginning that learning process. And Christine, I’m sorry I stood by. Never again!”

Contexts

- What *information* surrounds this text for study & could help make students' engagement with it more powerful?



As mentioned previously, *I Am Jack* is by no means an anomaly in its reliance on one actor to perform the entire show. At the McCallum, for example, student audiences have enjoyed one-person shows such as Gale LaJoye's *Snowflake* or last season's tour de force by Mona Golabek *The Pianist of Willesden Lane*. In addition to the examples already cited, we could easily add many more including Tovah Feldshuh as Golda Meir in *Golda's Balcony*, as well as the brilliant Anna Deveare Smith in her documentary theater pieces *Twilight: Los Angeles* and *Fires in the Mirror*. Trekkie Patrick Stewart played 43 roles in his one man version of Charles Dickens' holiday favorite, *A Christmas Carol*. Avant-garde Irish playwright Samuel Beckett fashioned his *Krapp's Last Tape* for a solo male performer, and more recently British actress Pauline Collins made a tasty meal of *Shirley Valentine*. Fringe Festivals often host groundbreaking works in which a solo performer holds the stage.

Some one-person plays call upon the performer to address the audience directly. This is called "breaking the fourth wall." Such a format may allow the person on stage to form a strong connection with those sitting in the audience, while giving the listeners the sense that they are privy to special information or are even entering into a relationship with the personage depicted. Other plays by contrast (Beckett's play is an example) don't allow for direct addressing of the audience. In these, the actor stays firmly within his or her role(s), and the fourth wall remains intact.

Where has this style of theater emerged from? Well, it's possible to see antecedents in storytellers, orators, and poets of ancient times, through whom oral histories and other texts were transmitted. Monologists in the era of Sophocles and company are surely some of the earliest examples before us. The minstrels of Merrie Olde England provide further instances. And we must add to these the troubadours from neighboring France. In the nineteenth century, literary figures such as Edgar Allen Poe and Charles Dickens traveled the American lecture circuit reading from their works. The latter, in particular, was given not to mere reading alone but frequently and most dramatically embodied the characters he had created. And Mark Twain, whose words would later provide fodder for Hal Holbrook's lively reenactments, developed his own presentational style to the extent that it became a matter of performance versus simple lecture. One can see how presentations of this sort gradually developed into monodramas, that is, entire plays performed by a single player, and in the process changed venue from lecture hall to theater.

When searching for reasons why actors might choose to take on such an assignment, consider this quotation from Enid Nemy (*Four for the Season, Alone in the Spotlight, New York Times* 10/5/84): "In the world of the theater, the one-man show is perhaps the closest thing to having it all, a supreme test of assurance and ability, of magnetism and charisma. The format is both seductive and frightening; there's no one to play against, to lean on, to share the criticism. But, for an actor, the prize at the end of a successful solo performance is not only applause but also acclaim—unshared."

To get ready for the performance, students could research these:

- Bullying
- Short story writing



Here's a 60 minute lesson* in collaboration & problem-solving you could teach to help prepare students for this work:

Line of Inquiry** How does Monkey Baa Theatre Company explore the issue of bullying through a dramatic rendering of a personal narrative?

Ask students the question: What are all the different things we know about bullying?

Offer students this bit of context: Author Susanne Gervay has written a story based partially on her own experience of being bullied – and partly on that of her son. A theater company has turned it into a one-man show. One actor plays all of the parts by himself.

Art Making in the area of Language Arts: Have students individually create stories about bullying. These can be based on personal experience, or not.

Reflection: Several students share their written stories out loud. Ask students open-ended questions that call for descriptions of the language, plot points, characters, problem and solution. Then, have students in pairs switch stories with each other. The reader of the story offers the writer some feedback. Afterward, ask students for some of their observations.

**In the case of Kindergarten and 1st Grade, perhaps writing becomes drawing and group work becomes the whole class?*

***A Line of Inquiry is an Essential Question that generates a lesson*

After coming to the theater, students could research these:

- Adaptation
- One-person plays



Here's a 45-60 minute lesson you could teach after students have experienced the work:

Ask students questions about their experience of the play: What are all the things we can describe in the performance? What happened in the play? What are some of the skills and tools the actor used to bring all those characters to life? How did he keep us from getting confused? Why was this play a good way to explore the theme of bullying? What did this show mean to you personally?

Ask specifically: What are the things the actor did to "change" from one character to another? (You could document the answers on the board as a helpful list of ideas for students to draw on in the next activity.)

Ask the question: How do we change a story into a play?

Art Making in Language Arts form: Have students convert their written stories into short plays.

Special problem to solve: There will only be one actor, so indicate in your writing what kinds of changes in posture, voice, gesture, etc. the actor is to make as s/he switches from one character to another.

Reflection: A couple of these are read aloud. Ask open-ended questions that deepen students' understanding of word choice, tone, playwriting genre, and techniques that allow one actor to embody multiple roles in a single scene.

“For an actor, it’s a real gift.
You’ve got all these characters.”

David Hynes • Actor



What's *your* read of this non-print text?

How would you answer these questions – and how could they be adapted as Guiding Questions to spark student discussion?

- What happens in this work? What are some of the key plot points?
- How does the actor use movement to make his characters distinct and specific?
- What are some of the skills used to produce expression?
- How do the characters interact?
- How would you describe the different qualities of the actor's "voices?"
- How is stage space used? How does the director place his actor in that space to heighten the effectiveness of the presentation?
- How would you characterize the language of the script?
- What do you notice about transitions between scenes?
- Describe the set. What specific scenic choices have been made?
- What role does lighting play?
- What do you notice about the actor's energy levels?
- How is the idea of pacing used here?
- What are some of the big ideas – or themes – explored in *I Am Jack*?
- What are the different ways in which a work like this can produce a positive impact on a student's life?
- How is humor used – and with what value?
- What mattered most to you in this show? Why?

Internet

Susanne Gervay

www.sgervay.com

Bullying

www.stopbullying.gov/kids/

Find facts, web episodes, and quizzes about bullying for kids.

PBS kids on bullying

www.pbskids.org/itsmylife/friends/bullies/

Bullies: What is bullying?

Picture a world without bullying

www.kzoo.edu/psych/stop_bullying/picture_a_world/index.html

A page within a larger anti-bullying site devoted to kids' art images.

Anti-bullying coloring book pages

www.pacer.org/bullying/pdf/ColorTheCrew.pdf

Lots of fun, meaningful anti-bullying activities

www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/toolkits/

Anti-bullying activities

www.freespirit.com/files/OTHER/NoKiddingAboutBullying_Intro.pdf

Facts about bullying and conflict in children's lives from *No Kidding About Bullying* by Naomi Drew, MA

Books

I Am Jack

By: Susanne Gervay

Reading level: 8 and up

Publisher: Kane/Miller Book Publishers (October 2012)

ISBN-10: 1610671287

The Juice Box Bully: Empowering Kids to Stand Up For Others

By: Bob Sornson

Reading level: 4 and up

Publisher: Ferne Press (September 2010)

ISBN-10: 1933916729

Have you ever seen a bully in action and done nothing about it? The kids at Pete's new school get involved, instead of being bystanders. When Pete begins to behave badly, his classmates teach him about "The Promise."

Books

Confessions of a Former Bully

By: Trudy Ludwig

Reading level: 8 and up

Publisher: Dragonfly Books (July 2012)

ISBN-10: 0307931137

After Katie gets caught teasing a schoolmate, she's to meet with the school counselor. It doesn't take long before Katie realizes that bullying has hurt not only the people around her, but her, too. Told from the unusual point of view of the bully rather than the bullied, *Confessions of a Former Bully* provides kids with real life tools they can use to identify and stop relational aggression.

Stand Up for Yourself and Your Friends: Dealing with Bullies and Bossiness and Finding a Better Way

By: Patti Kelley Criswell

Reading level: 8 and up

Publisher: American Girl (March 2009)

ISBN-10: 1593694822

This book teaches girls how to spot bullying and how to stand up and speak out against it. Quizzes, quotes from other girls, and "what do you do?" scenarios present advice in an age-appropriate, digestible way.

One

By: Kathryn Otoshi

Reading level: 4 and up

Publisher: KO Kids Books (October 2008)

ISBN-10: 0972394648

Blue is a quiet color. Red's a hothead who likes to pick on Blue. Yellow, Orange, Green, and Purple don't like what they see, but what can they do? When no one speaks up, things get out of hand — until One comes along and shows all the colors how to stand up, stand together, and count. As budding young readers learn about numbers, counting, and primary and secondary colors, they also learn about accepting each other's differences and how it sometimes just takes one voice to make everyone count.

No Kidding About Bullying: 125 Ready-to-Use Activities to Help Kids Manage Anger, Resolve Conflicts, Build Empathy, and Get Along

By: Naomi Drew, MA

Reading Level: 8 and up

Publisher: Free Spirit Publishing (July 2010)

ISBN-10: 1575423499

Prevent bullying behaviors, help students become "up standers" for themselves and others, and foster respectful, welcoming classroom communities with this flexible resource. Featuring lessons that may be completed in 20 minutes or less, the book can be used as a stand-alone curriculum or as a complement to other anti-bullying and character education programs.

DVDs

Arthur Stands Up to Bullying

Studio: PBS Direct

DVD Release: July 16, 2013

ASIN: B00C888ISS

Based on the best-selling children's books by Marc Brown, join the world's most famous aardvark, eight-year-old Arthur Read, and his family and friends as they stand up to bullying, learn about teasing, think about friendship, and much more!

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“The most important lesson he learns is that he is not alone and that calling for help does work.”

David Hynes • Actor