

My Father's Dragon

Monday, March 19, 2018 @ 10:00 am

Study Guide



YES! @LOH
2017-2018
SEASON

The 2017-18 **Youth Education Series** at Lebanon Opera House is generously supported in part by our sponsors. Thank you to:



theatre etiquette

We are looking forward to your visit to Lebanon Opera House! Please take a moment to review our house rules and common theater etiquette with your class before attending the performance. Enjoy the show!



Do:

- Arrive at Lebanon Opera House early.
- Use the restroom before the performance.
- Turn off cell phones, pagers, watch alarms, and other electronic devices.
- Keep your feet on the floor.
- Show your appreciation of the performers by applauding.
- Stay with your group or school at all times.
- Wait for your school or group to be dismissed by the announcer after the show.

Don't:

- Stand in the aisles or stairwells.
- Put your feet on the seats or balcony railing.
- Talk, sing, hum, or fidget.
- Take pictures or record the actors during the performance.
- Leave the theater during the performance.
- Kick the seat in front of you.
- Eat, drink or chew gum in the theater.
- Leave your seat before the performers have taken their curtain call.

A Study Guide for Classroom Teachers

MY FATHER'S DRAGON

The Newbery Honor-winning classic about a daring dragon rescue!



Based on the beloved stories by Ruth Stiles Gannett

ENCHANTMENT THEATRE COMPANY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter to Teachers	2
Show Synopsis – My Father’s Dragon	3
About the books.....	7
About the Author.....	9
About the Play.....	10
Before You See My Father’s Dragon	12
Activity One: Understand the Story.....	12
Questions for Class Discussion	12
Activity Two: Prepare for the Play	13
Questions for Class Discussion	13
After You See My Father’s Dragon	14
Activity One: Respond to the Play	14
Questions for Class Discussion	14
Activity Two: Discover Theater in the Classroom.....	15
Introducing Enchantment Theatre Company	17
Additional Pre-Show Activities.....	20
Explore Imagination.....	20
Use Your Imagination!.....	20
The Role of Music	22
Music and Character	22
Music and Setting	22
Music and Mood.....	22
Jobs in the Theater	23
Additional Post-Show Activities	24
Storytelling and Writing.....	24
Nature and Conservation	24
Introduction to Theater	26
Introduction to Masks and Puppets.....	26
Experiencing Live Theater.....	27
Preparing to See the Play	27
A Few Simple Guidelines	27
References and Resources	28



Dear Teachers,

Thank you for taking your class to see our production of *My Father's Dragon*. We hope you all enjoy it!

We believe that experiencing theater is essential for children to thrive, and it's the initiative taken by teachers like you that enables so many children to see our productions who may not otherwise have this unique opportunity.

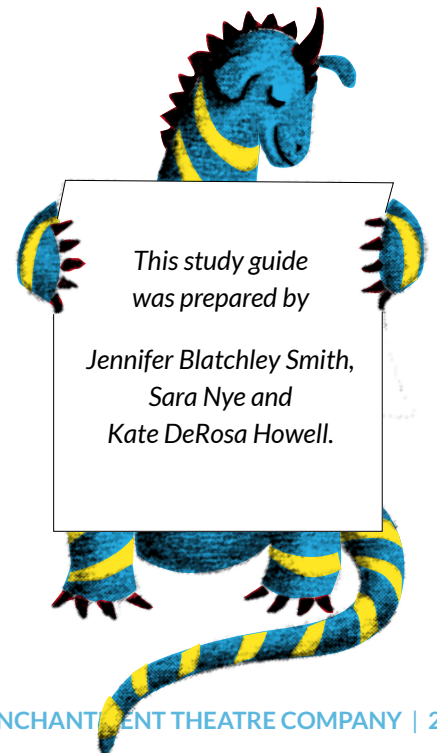
We've provided this study guide to help you extend your theater experience into the classroom, should you have time for special activities before or after your class trip. In addition to the information and activities in the beginning of the study guide, there are supplementary materials included at the end with additional activities and more detailed information about the theater.

We hope you find some of our suggestions fun, educational, and adaptable to suit your varying needs. Thank you again and we look forward to seeing you at the show!

Sincerely,

The Staff of Enchantment Theatre Company

**Visit Enchantment
Theatre Company at
enchantmenttheatre.org**



*This study guide
was prepared by*

*Jennifer Blatchley Smith,
Sara Nye and
Kate DeRosa Howell.*



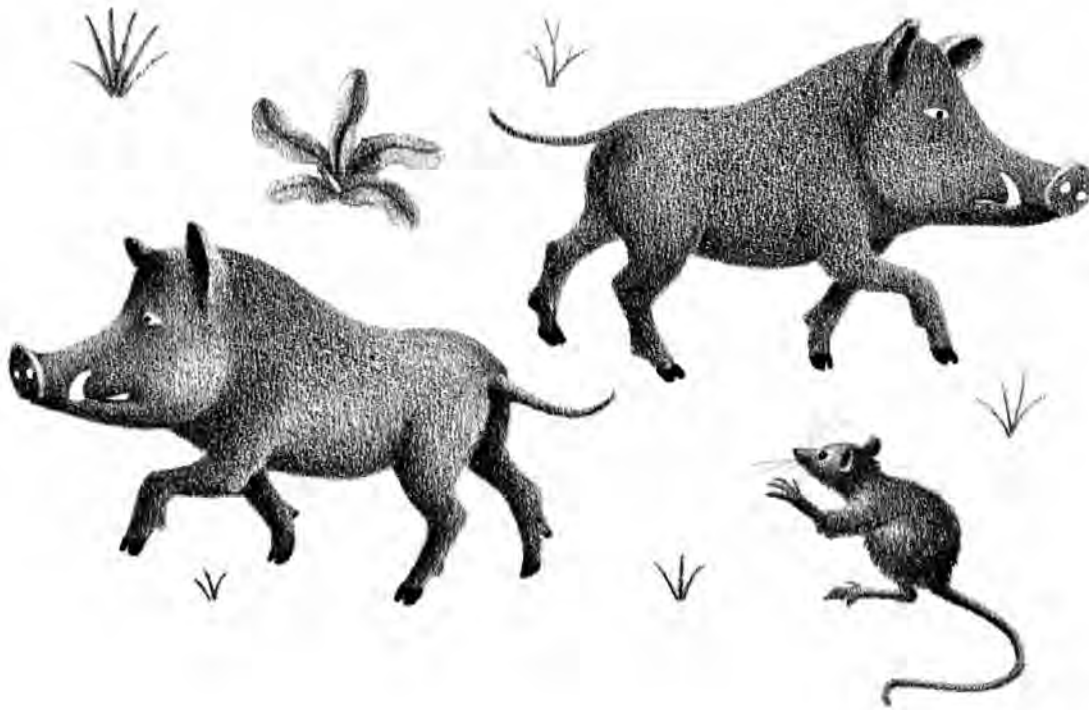
SHOW SYNOPSIS — MY FATHER'S DRAGON



At the beginning of the play we meet all the actors and are introduced to some of the modes we'll be using to tell our story, including masks, puppets and scenic projections.

The narrator (the voice of the play) introduces the beginning of the adventure where we meet nine year old Elmer Elevator and discover that he loves animals. Elmer frees the family canary, Flute, from his cage and then invites an old alley cat into his house. Elmer's mother doesn't want a dirty alley cat inside and sends her away. Elmer is frustrated with his mother for being mean to the cat and wishes that he could just fly away himself. The cat tells Elmer she knows how he can fly – on the back of a dragon! The cat explains that there's a baby dragon who's being held captive by the ferocious animals of Wild Island. Elmer vows to help the dragon and, with the cat's assistance, he collects all the things he thinks he'll need: sandwiches, toothbrush and tooth paste, chewing gum, hairbrush, ribbons, magnifying glasses and lollipops. At the last minute he realizes that the cat isn't going with him; she's too old to make the trip. The cat gives Elmer a golden feather from the dragon as a token for his journey. Elmer stows away on a boat and journeys toward Wild Island. Once the boat docks, Elmer asks a passing fisherman for directions. The fisherman points the way to Wild Island but warns Elmer that it's a very dangerous place. Elmer discovers a line of rocks leading to the island and jumps across them at low tide to make his way to the island.

Once at Wild Island Elmer is almost discovered by two warthogs. One of the warthogs follows Elmer's tracks as he makes his way toward the dragon. Elmer is chased by two tigers and he distracts them by giving them chewing gum. Then he encounters a fierce rhinoceros who he helps by giving him toothpaste to polish his yellow tusk. Each time Elmer manages to escape from the distracted animals. Meanwhile, the dragon is working hard carrying heavy loads and longs to see his family again. As Elmer continues searching for the dragon he runs



right into a lion who explains that he's so mad he could eat Elmer right up. Elmer discovers that the lion is upset because his mane is a mess and he's afraid his mother will cut off his allowance. Elmer pulls the hairbrush and ribbons out of his pack and gives them to the lion who immediately begins to fix his mane and happily runs off.

Elmer suddenly remembers his own family and in a 'back home' sequence, he imagines his parents at home, worried about him. Elmer comes back to himself as he hears a distant dragon cry. He hurries along, but a giant gorilla appears in front of him. The gorilla threatens Elmer but suddenly stops and begins scratching and yelling, "Blast those fleas!" He calls out for two little monkeys who begin to scratch him on his back but say that the fleas are too hard to see. Elmer pulls out the magnifying glasses he packed and gives one to each monkey who are now able to find the fleas. The three animals are so involved in finding the fleas that Elmer is able to sneak away and escape.

At last Elmer comes to the river but doesn't know how to get across. Suddenly a hungry crocodile pops his head out of the river and as Elmer backs away, three more crocodiles appear. Elmer offers the crocodiles lollipops if they'll make a 'crocodile' bridge across the river. The crocodiles agree and Elmer runs across their backs to the other side. Once he lands, Elmer looks around and then hears the dragon cry and warthog noises. The warthogs appear and surround Elmer, asking him what he's doing there. Elmer suddenly remembers he has one last peanut butter and jelly sandwich and tells the warthogs he brought something special just for them. He pulls out the sandwich and the warthogs fight over it and chase each other offstage.





The dragon enters with a rope around his neck and Elmer quickly releases him. They shyly introduce themselves and Elmer explains that the cat had told him about the dragon's plight and he came to rescue him. The dragon invites Elmer to get on his back just as the warthogs enter. Elmer and the dragon fly away and leave the angry warthogs behind. The dragon and Elmer land on Tangerina Island but aren't sure which direction to fly to get home. A passing sea gull points them across the sea, warning them to watch out for storms. The dragon is worried about the long trip but Elmer reassures him they'll find their way.

As Elmer and the dragon circle the stage a storm comes up. They struggle against the storm but begin to fall. Suddenly they land on a sandbar and see an island in the distance. They make their way to the island, and while the dragon rests, Elmer looks for food and water. Suddenly a bright yellow canary enters and flies to Elmer – it's his friend Flute! Flute explains that the island is called Feather Island and it's where all escaped canaries live. Elmer introduces Flute to the dragon, who explains that his name is actually Boris. Flute leads Elmer and Boris to food and then asks if they can help him. It seems that the King of the Canaries has an awful disease—a curiosity disease—and all the canaries on the island have caught it. Elmer and Boris travel with Flute and meet the King, but the King is reluctant to tell them what he's curious about. Finally the King admits that there's a hidden treasure chest on the island and he's dying to know what's in it. Elmer and Boris dig up the treasure and the King generously shares it with them and with all of the canaries. Flute shows Boris the way to go home and Elmer promises he'll give Flute's greetings to his mother.

Elmer and Boris fly home and land on the dock where Elmer sailed from. Elmer tries to persuade Boris to stay but Boris wants to get home to his own family. Boris gives Elmer his part of the canary treasure and thanks him for saving his life. They pledge to meet again and Boris flies off to his family. Elmer arrives at his house and is joyfully reunited with his parents and the alley cat and all is forgiven. Elmer gives his parents the canary's treasure and as they all look out, the shadow of the dragon flies overhead.



ABOUT THE BOOKS



Our play is based on two of Ruth Stiles Gannett's "Dragon" books: *My Father's Dragon* and *Elmer and the Dragon*, published in 1948 and 1950, respectively.

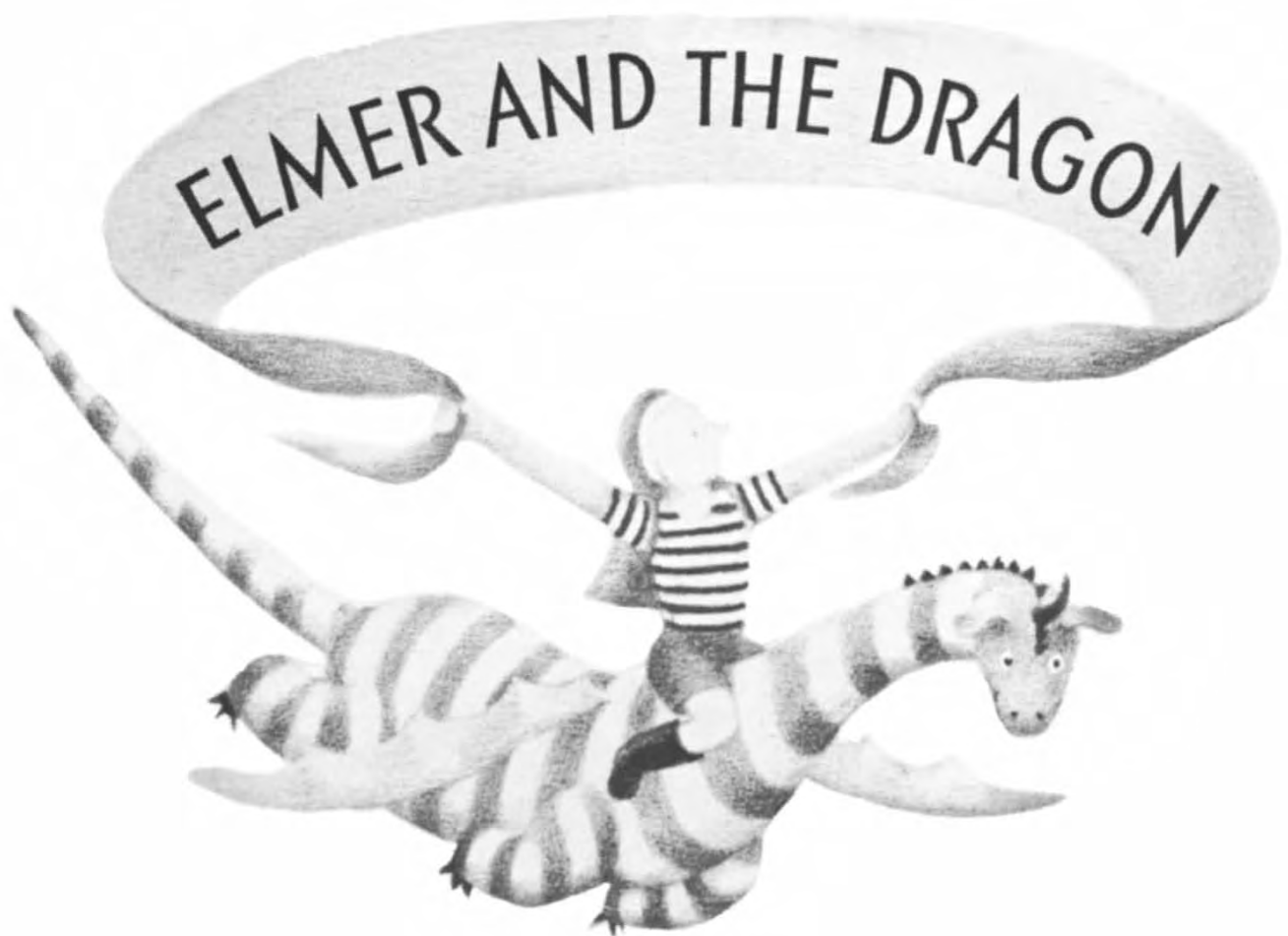
My Father's Dragon is told by a narrator who is recounting the story of his father, Elmer Elevator. One rainy afternoon when Elmer was nine years old, he met an alley cat and invited him into his house. The cat told Elmer about a baby dragon who was being held captive by the ferocious animals of Wild Island. Elmer decided to set off on a journey to rescue the dragon and return him to his home. With the help of the cat, Elmer packed everything he thought he'd need in his backpack, including sandwiches, chewing gum, lollipops, hair ribbons, rubber bands and magnifying glasses. Elmer stowed away on a boat and traveled to the island of Tangerina. He wasn't sure how to get to Wild Island but realized he could jump across rocks at low tide to make his way to the island. Once on Wild Island, Elmer needed to find the baby dragon and avoid being captured, and possibly eaten, by the wild animals. With bravery and ingenuity, Elmer used the items he brought to escape a pair of warthogs, outwit two tigers and help a rhinoceros, a lion and a gorilla. He offered his lollipops to some hungry alligators who made a bridge for him to cross the river to reach Boris, the dragon. The story ends with Elmer releasing Boris from his bonds and Elmer and Boris flying away to safety.



Elmer and the Dragon picks up at the end of *My Father's Dragon*, with Elmer and Boris flying back to Tangerina. They realize they'll need to cross the ocean to get back home and chart a long and dangerous course. They get lost in a storm and almost think they're done for, but luckily they land on sandbar instead. They discover a magical island of escaped canaries called Feather Island, where Elmer is reunited with his families' lost canary, Flute. Flute enlists Elmer and Boris to help the King of the Canaries overcome his mysterious "curiosity disease"

which all the canaries on the island have contracted. The King reveals his secret to Elmer and Boris and what he's so curious about—a stash of hidden riches. Elmer and Boris help the canaries dig up the treasure and are rewarded for their service. With bags of gold and the canaries' blessings, the dauntless duo at last returns home. They pledge to meet again and Boris flies off to find his family while Elmer returns home to his parents and the newly adopted alley cat.

These magical books have continued to enchant young readers with their whimsy, tenderness and adventure.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



RUTH STILES GANNETT

Ruth Stiles Gannett was born on August 12, 1923 and grew up in New York City. Her father, Lewis Stiles Gannett, was a book reviewer for the New York Herald Tribune, and her mother, Mary Ross Gannett, was also a book reviewer and an editor. Her parents divorced in the early 1930's and her father remarried Ruth Chrisman, an award-winning illustrator. Ruth Stiles Gannett attended George School in Newtown, PA and graduated from Vassar College in 1944 with a degree in chemistry.

When Ruth was twenty-three years old, during “two rainy weeks” in 1946 while between jobs, she began writing what would become *My Father's Dragon*. At the time she wrote the story “to amuse myself” and never anticipated that her delightfully funny tale would be published. But her family encouraged her to show the story to a Random House editor, who accepted the book and then asked her stepmother, Ruth Chrisman Gannett, to illustrate it. The book became a family affair when her husband to be, Peter Kahn, chose the type. *My Father's Dragon* was published in 1948 and went on to become a Newbery Honor Book and ALA Notable Book. Ruth wrote two “Dragon” sequels, all three of which have been in print continuously. The books have been translated into sixteen languages and are much beloved in Japan, where the book is required reading in elementary schools. Children and parents from around the world continue to

write Ruth fan letters about her magical tales. In talking about where the stories came from, Ruth says, “I attended the City and Country School in New York City where I was encouraged to read and write ‘just for the fun of it’ and to explore the world of my imagination. My books came out of a happy childhood.”

In 1947, Ruth married Peter Kahn, an artist and professor of art, calligraphy and art history, who taught at Cornell University for more than 30 years. Ruth raised seven daughters and has continued to be active in her community and involved with activities related to her books. She lives in a large yellow Victorian house in the outskirts of Trumansburg, NY.

ABOUT THE PLAY

In our production of *My Father's Dragon* we use a number of different theatrical devices to bring the story to life. Here are some of the things you and your students can expect to see:

- **Masks:** In the show, some of the actors wear masks to help them become characters such as Elmer and his parents and other actors will wear animal masks to help them portray the different animal characters. Masks have been used in theater since its earliest beginnings, and they help to transform the actor and to transport the audience to another world.
- **Mime:** Mime is acting without speaking or making any noise. In *My Father's Dragon*, the performers act out the story with their bodies and gestures, but they do not speak.
- **Words and Music:** There is recorded narration spoken by Susan Sweeney throughout the show to help the audience follow the story. Original music, composed by Charles Gilbert especially for this production, adds to the atmosphere.
- **Puppets:** Some of the characters in the story are played by actors wearing masks and costumes. Other characters—Flute the Canary, the giant Gorilla, the two monkeys—are played by puppets. Sometimes Boris the Dragon and Elmer will also appear as puppets. **ROD PUPPETS** (manipulated by sticks) and **HAND PUPPETS** will be the primary puppet devices you'll see.
- **Scenery:** Most of the scenery will be projected onto the screens at the rear of the stage—so you'll see Elmer's house, the dock, Tangerina Island, different locations at Wild Island and Feather Island—all projected upstage. There will also be some scenery pieces to help create the environment of the play, the dock and boat, trees at Tangerina and Wild Island, water and rocks etc.
- **Lighting:** Special theatrical lights will help create the mood and the world of the story.

Note: Very young children may be confused or even frightened by the characters wearing masks. Show them the production photos on our website so they know what to expect. Another way to prepare is to have students experiment with masks in class. Have them silently act out different characters, actions, and emotions while wearing simple masks, and see if their classmates can guess who or what they are portraying. Talk about different ways we can communicate without using words or facial expressions. A few scenes in the show are performed in low light. Prepare children who are afraid of the dark by encouraging them to talk about their fears. Ask them to guess what parts of the story might take place when the stage is darker.





BEFORE YOU SEE MY FATHER'S DRAGON

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Activity One: Understand the Story

- Read the *My Father's Dragon* show synopsis on page 3
- Discuss student's reactions to the story and characters

Questions for Class Discussion

1. Who is the main character of this story? Who are some of the other characters?
2. What are some words to describe Elmer at the beginning of the story? Explain.
3. What are some words to describe Elmer's Mother at the beginning of the story? What about Boris the Dragon? Explain.
4. Why is Elmer mad at his Mother?
5. What things does Elmer pack to take with him on his trip?
6. Why does Elmer travel to Wild Island?
7. What animals does Elmer meet at Wild Island?
8. How does Elmer use the chewing gum he brings? How does he use the toothbrush, hairbrush and magnifying glasses? What about the lollipops?
9. What does Elmer do to overcome the two warthogs?
10. What does Boris the dragon want the most?
11. When Elmer and Boris get caught in the storm, what happens?
12. Who do Elmer and Boris meet on Feather Island?
13. How do Elmer and Boris help the King of the Canaries?
14. Did Elmer change at the end of the story...how?

Activity Two: Prepare for the Play

Enchantment Theatre Company's production of *My Father's Dragon* is an **adaptation**. That means that Enchantment Theatre Company read the two 'Dragon' stories outlined on pages 7–8 and then had to come up with a way to combine the tales and make the story come to life on stage!

Questions for Class Discussion

1. Define "adaptation" with your class. (Synonyms: adjust, modify, convert, transform).
2. A Japanese anime version based on *My Father's Dragon* was released in 1997 and an American company is currently creating an animated version of the book for release within the next two years. The creators of both these animated films had to adapt the stories when they created their films.
3. Ask your class to identify some fairy tales that they know (*Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Pinocchio*, etc.). Find a story with which most of the class is familiar and discuss all the different adaptations of that story.
 - a. How many of you have seen a movie, play, ballet, or cartoon of the Beauty and the Beast story?
 - b. How many have you have read the story in a book?
 - c. What was different about these adaptations? What was similar?
 - d. Do you know which adaptation came first?
4. Have you ever read a book and then seen the movie adaptation of that book? How were they alike? How were they different? Which did you prefer and why?
5. The performers will be acting out the story of Elmer and his quest to rescue Boris the dragon.
 - a. What do you imagine the play will be like? What will it look like/sound like?
 - b. How do you think watching the play will be different from reading the story?
6. Define the following (reference page 10): masks, mime, music, puppets, scenery. You will see all of these during the play.



AFTER YOU SEE MY FATHER'S DRAGON

Activity One: Respond to the Play

- Review the performance and ask students to describe with as much detail as possible what they remember. What animals did they see? What were the costumes like? How did the actors transform themselves to play different characters? What was the scenery like? What kind of music was used?
- Ask the students to help make a list of different things that happened in the performance. Write these down on the board.

Questions for Class Discussion

1. Who is the main character in the story? How do you know that?
2. How did you feel about not being able to see the actor's faces completely?
3. Did you have to use your imagination when you watched this play? Explain.
4. What happened in the story that was surprising? Exciting? Funny? Scary?
5. How was the play different than the story you read in class (if you read the story prior to seeing the play). How was it the same?
6. Did the music help tell the story? How?
7. How did the actors show how they were feeling and what they were doing without words? (see Activity Two for more)
8. List characters that were portrayed by actors; then list some that were portrayed by puppets.
9. Elmer packed things he thought he'd need on Wild Island; what items did he pack and how did he use them?
10. Elmer likes animals – name three animals that Elmer helped in the play.
11. Dragons appear in stories from all over the world—can you name some other stories where dragons are important characters? Are they gentle or scary?
12. At the beginning of the play Elmer is upset with his mother because she didn't want the Alley Cat in their house, but at the end he is very happy to see her again. What do you think caused Elmer to change?
13. Name a time you mad at someone and then forgave them. Did you feel better afterwards?
14. What do you think Elmer learned by helping Boris?
15. If the story kept on going, what do you think would happen?

Activity Two: Discover Theater in the Classroom

In *My Father's Dragon*, the actors were able to communicate ideas and feelings without using words. Discuss with the students how the actors let the audience know what was happening, even when they weren't using their voices.

Use the following activities to explore the possibilities of communicating without speaking:

1. **Invisible Object:** Imagine you are holding a very heavy bowling ball. Pass it around the circle without speaking and without dropping it! Think about how you have to stand to hold a heavy object, what your muscles feel like, how slowly you have to move. Give prompts like, "Be ready for it! It's heavy. Make sure your neighbor has it before you let it go!" When it's gone all the way around, try passing around a very light feather, a hot potato, a live frog. "Don't let it get away!" Don't say what it is you are passing, have the students guess based on how you handle the imaginary object.
2. **Without Words:** Ask students to think of actions or gestures they use to communicate. For example, can they think of ways to act surprised using only their face? Can they say something without using any words? Without speaking, try saying:

Hello!	I don't know
Yes! / No!	I'm hungry
I'm sleepy	Go away! / Come here!
I'm scared	That's funny!
I'm going to sneeze	Where are you?
It's over there	My stomach hurts
I love you	

3. **Tableau:** Now try to communicate a larger idea as a group. Still without talking, your students will have to create a tableau, or a frozen picture, of a place or activity of your choosing. They should try to do different things from each other. For example, if the activity is recess, not everyone should be playing kickball. You should see people frozen in mid-run, sitting and laughing together, throwing a ball, etc. Try the following:
 - a. At recess
 - b. In the desert
 - c. Having a picnic
 - d. Getting ready for school
 - e. Everyone is a dragon looking for food

4. **How Do You Move?** Make a space in the classroom for the students to move freely. Tell the students they are standing on a towel on a very hot beach and in order to get to the ocean they must walk through the scalding hot sand. Ouch! How do they move across the space? Other suggestions for environments to move through:
 - a. A sidewalk covered with chewed bubble gum
 - b. A frozen pond
 - c. A very steep hill
 - d. A pond scattered with stepping stones
 - e. The surface of the moon
 - f. A giant bowl of Jell-O

5. **More Mime:** Extend the space exploration to include other imaginary activities:
 - a. Carefully paint a door. After finishing, open the door and step through it without getting any paint on your clothes.
 - b. Build a snowman. The teacher should be able to tell how big the snowman is by how the student uses the space.
 - c. Eat an ice cream cone. At some point, the ice cream should fall on the floor. How do you react to this?
 - d. Rake leaves into a large pile. Admire the size of the pile, make sure no one is looking, and then jump into it.

5. To conclude, ask the students to list the ways they saw one another communicate without using words (through facial expressions, movement, gesture).

INTRODUCING ENCHANTMENT THEATRE COMPANY

Enchantment Theatre Company Mission Statement

Enchantment Theatre Company inspires children to dream, explore, think and connect through imaginative storytelling onstage and in the classroom.

We bring stories to life in a way that encourages children to dream about who they are and may become, to explore story from different perspectives, to think using inductive reasoning and to connect to other people and ideas. We aspire to transform young audiences into curious, creative and compassionate adults.

Enchantment Theatre Company is a professional non-profit arts organization based in Philadelphia whose mission is to create original theater for children and families. For over 35 years, the Company has performed throughout the United States, Canada, and the Far East, presenting imaginative and innovative theatrical productions for school groups and families. Originally a privately owned touring company, in 2000 Enchantment put down new roots in Philadelphia, where it was reestablished as a resident non-profit theater. While dedicated to serving its home community, the Company also maintains an extensive national touring schedule that includes performances on its own and in collaboration with the nation's finest symphony orchestras. In its home city, Enchantment has reached audiences of about 20,000 per year through its innovative and imaginative presentations of literary classics for children. Its newest program, *Enchantment Everywhere*, was started in the spring of 2014, and takes completely portable productions directly into school auditoriums, community centers and local venues—anywhere children and families gather—providing free tickets to thousands of children. On tour across the United States each year, the Company reaches more than 150,000 people in 35–40 states. Based on extensive experience, about 80% of the Company's touring audience is comprised of children from 5–12 who delight in the company's fantastic life-size puppets, skilled masked actors, original music, and startling feats of magic and illusion. It is to their infectious laughs, astonished gasps, and enthusiastic applause that Enchantment is dedicated.



My Father's Dragon

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Additional Pre-Show Activities.....	20
Explore Imagination.....	20
Use Your Imagination!.....	20
The Role of Music	22
Music and Character	22
Music and Setting	22
Music and Mood.....	22
Jobs in the Theater	23
Additional Post-Show Activities	24
Storytelling and Writing.....	24
Nature and Conservation	24
Introduction to Theater	26
Introduction to Masks and Puppets.....	26
Experiencing Live Theater.....	27
Preparing to See the Play	27
A Few Simple Guidelines	27
References and Resources	28

ADDITIONAL PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

Explore Imagination

When you hear a story read to you, you imagine what the characters look like and what they're doing. You use your imagination to create the story in your mind. When Enchantment created its adaptation of *My Father's Dragon*, the artists and designers who worked on the show used their imaginations in the same way. They asked themselves: How can we bring the drawings to life on stage? What will Elmer Elevator look like? What will Boris the dragon look like? What kind of masks will the characters wear? What about their costumes and props? Which characters will be puppets, which will be actors? How will we create Wild Island? How will we show Elmer leaping across the backs of the crocodiles? What will the music sound like? Having an active imagination can help you in many ways

Having an active imagination can help you in many ways.

1. Have you ever used your imagination to solve a problem or find your way out of a difficult situation?
2. Have you ever used your imagination to make something ordinary become more exciting (*for example, pretending that the jungle gym is a rocket ship*)?
3. Have you ever had a dream or a daydream that seemed so real you almost *believed* it really happened? Have students share stories in pairs or with the class.
4. Can you think of a time that your imagination "played a trick on you" and you imagined something scary was happening that turned out to be something different (*for example, you thought you heard a burglar in the house but it turned out to be a mouse*)? Have students share stories in pairs or with the class.
5. Have you ever used your imagination to make up an original story or play?

Use Your Imagination!

1. **Simple Shape:** Draw a simple shape on the black board (*for example, triangle*) and ask students to look closely. If we use our imaginations, what can this simple shape become? Does it resemble anything (*for example, a mountain, a triangle instrument, a rooftop, a clown hat, a slice of pie, etc*)? Have students come up to the board and add details to the shape to create some of these images. Repeat the exercise with other shapes.
2. **Simple Shape Group:** To follow up with a group shape activity, put students together in small groups and give each group one large sheet of white paper and several basic shapes cut out of colored paper. Ask the students to lay the shapes on the paper in different combinations to create pictures (*for example, a half circle under a triangle to create a sail boat, a triangle over a square to create a house*). When the group is happy with its picture, have them glue the shapes into place.
3. **Scribble:** Ask students to scribble on a sheet of paper with their eyes closed. After a few seconds have everyone open their eyes and look closely at the scribbled page. Ask students, "What does your scribble look like? Can you find an image in the design?" Instruct students to take a crayon or marker and trace the outline of the image they see. Then, ask them to add details to turn their scribble designs to create complete pictures.

4. **Group Draw:** To follow up with a group drawing activity, put students together in small groups and give each student a sheet of paper and a different color crayon or marker. Ask the students to start drawing a tree. After a short time (5-10 seconds), ask everyone to put their markers down and pass their paper to the left. Each student should end up with a new tree. Ask the students to pick up their markers and add on to this new tree. After another 5 seconds, ask the students to put down their markers. Repeat these steps until everyone gets back the tree they started.
5. **Take a Walk:** Take your class for a walk through the school or outside. Ask them to imagine they are ... and let that change the way they walk:
 - a. Elmer Elevator exploring Wild Island
 - b. A Tiger slowly circling Elmer
 - c. A Rhinoceros charging at Elmer
 - d. A Gorilla scratching for fleas
 - e. Boris the Dragon flying



THE ROLE OF MUSIC

Charlie Gilbert is the composer for the music for *My Father's Dragon*. He has worked on a number of Enchantment Theatre productions, including Enchantment's *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, *Aladdin and Other Enchanting Tales*, which he adapted from Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic suite, *Scheherazade*, and the music for *Peter Rabbit™ Tales*. Charlie recently composed the score for Enchantment's adaptation of *The Beast in the Bayou*, based on *Beauty and the Beast*, and *The Bremen Town Musicians*. Charlie's music for *My Father's Dragon* underscores the action of the story, and helps the performers tell the tale without words.

Music and Character

One of the ways the composer helps to tell the story is to create musical “themes” or melodies that occur again and again throughout the play. When you see the play, see if you can find the theme music for Elmer. Is there a theme you hear for Boris the Dragon? What about for Elmer's mother and father? See if you notice any recurring melodies for other characters? Can you name the instruments that were used for Elmer's theme?

Music and Setting

The music in a performance can often indicate a new setting. Listen for the changes in the music when Elmer lands on Wild Island; when Elmer and Boris first meet; when Elmer and Boris discover Feather Island; when our two heroes return to Elmer's home. Were there other musical setting changes that the students noticed?

Music and Mood

The composer has an important job in setting the mood or atmosphere of a play by the music he creates. For example, when Elmer is frightened by the Rhinoceros the music is very different than when he meets Boris for the first time..

1. Have you ever seen a scary movie or been to a haunted house? Describe the music you heard. How did the music help make the movie/experience scary?
2. Have you ever been to a circus and heard happy, carnival music? What if you heard that music when you were at school? What would you think was happening? If you were a composer, what kind of music would you write for the scene in which Elmer is being chased by the Tigers?
3. What was the mood of the music at the end of the play?

To illustrate the role of music in storytelling, try the following activities:

1. Ask your students to recall a personal experience (*for example, a family vacation or the first day of school*). Ask one student to tell his/her story to the class. After he/she is finished, have the same student retell the same story. This time, play a dynamic track of music (preferably instrumental) to underscore the story. Ask the class how this music affected the story. When you attend the performance, encourage your students to pay attention to the music, and remember how the music created different moods within the piece.
2. Get the entire class up and away from their desks. Play a piece of music and ask everyone to move or dance how the music makes them feel. Does it make you want to sneak? Look for something? Skip? Does it make you feel sleepy? Angry? Scared? After a minute or so, play a different piece of music with a vastly different mood. Switch at least one more time.

JOBS IN THE THEATER

1. What kind of jobs do you imagine people have at the theater? Can you name five different kinds of theater jobs?
2. When your class comes to the theater, look around to see what kinds of jobs people are doing. You will see someone in the box office, ushers, and actors. There are also people doing many jobs you don't see: the stage manager who calls the cues for the show; the lighting technician who runs the lights; the director who directed the actors in rehearsal; the costume designer; the designers who created the masks, puppets, and scenery; the people who publicize the show, answer the phones, and sell the tickets.

ADDITIONAL POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

Storytelling and Writing

Try these writing exercises to get your students writing and illustrating their own stories. Talk about the following important parts of a story: setting, introduction to characters, conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution.

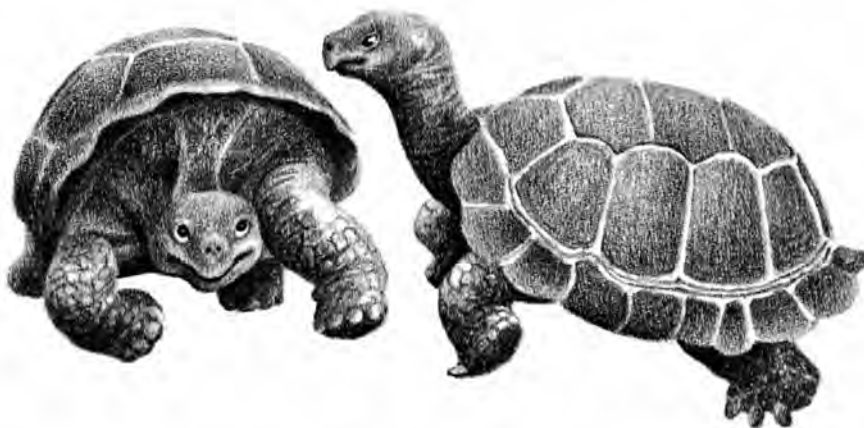
- **Group Storytelling (Listening, Speaking):** Tell a story as a group with each student telling just one line at a time. You can begin the story to set-up the adventure, but you never know where it will go. For example: “One day, Hawthorne School’s fourth grade class (substitute your school and class) decided to go on a walk to Blue Creek Park (substitute a location near you).” Go around the room with each student contributing one line. Remind students to listen to what has been said and build on what has already happened in the story. Help them move the story along and find an ending.
- **Writing a Story in Pairs (Writing, Reading):** Divide students into pairs. Ask each student to write the first line of a story. Ask everyone to put pencils down after the first sentence. Have students trade papers with their partner, read the first line of their partner’s story, and add a second line. Ask everyone to put pencils down and trade papers again. Repeat this process until partners reach a conclusion to both stories. Once they are done, you could have students copy these stories onto blank paper, one or two lines per page, and have them illustrate them.
- **Draw Your Own Tale (Drawing, Visual):** Imagine that you’re an animal who lives in the woods. What kind of animal are you? Do you live in a tree trunk... under the ground? Who are your friends? Are there other animals that frighten you? Draw an adventure you might have in the woods. What are you looking for? Who do you meet? What do you find? How do you get home? Can you write captions for each drawing you create?

Nature and Conservation

Animals—Wild and Tame

Elmer saves a mythical animal, Boris the Dragon, but he also encounters many different kinds of domestic and wild animals during his adventure. A domestic animal is one that is tame and depends on humans for its survival. A wild animal may live near humans but lives without their care in its natural habitat.

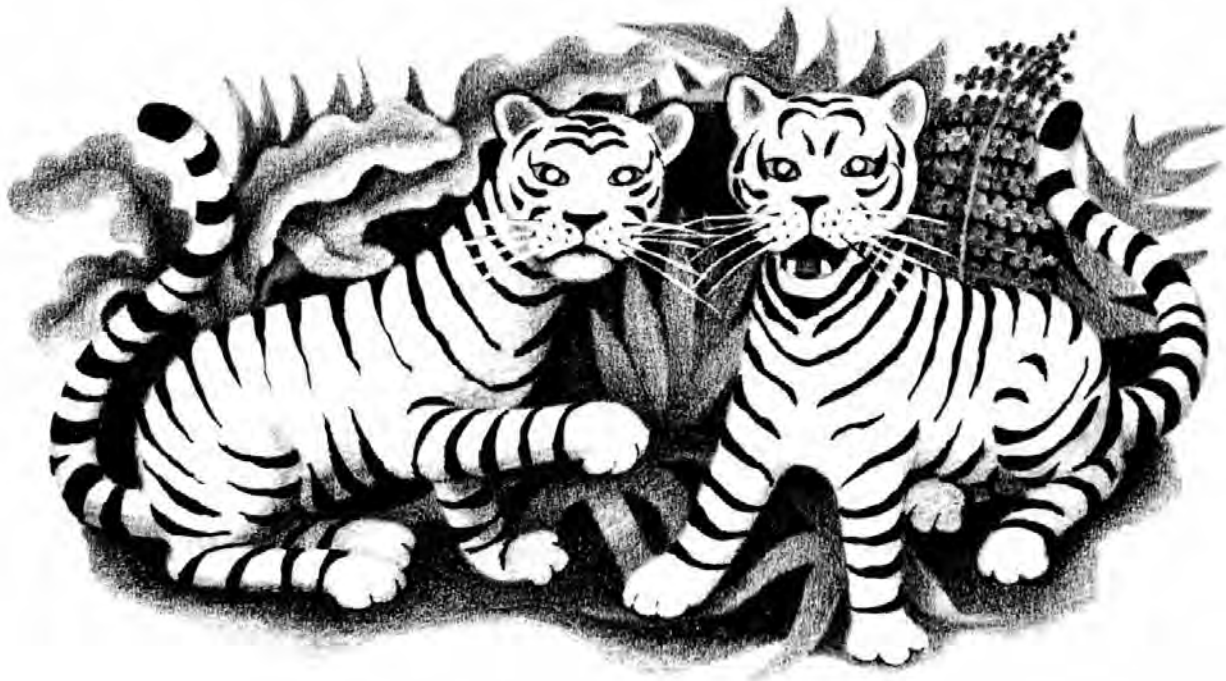
- Which are the domestic animals and which are the wild animals in the story?
- Do you have any domestic animals who live with your family?
- Name three wild animals who live near your home.



Adopt an Endangered Species

Together with the class, research and choose an endangered species to adopt. You can visit your local zoo, aquarium or wildlife center for more information or look on the websites of the Nature Conservancy or the World Wildlife Fund. There may be a list of endangered animals on your state's website.

- Learn what the students can do to help protect a species close to home
- What are the threats to the animal and how it can be helped?
- Track the progress of the animal and find ways the students can raise awareness in their school or community, such as a series of displays, poster campaign or fundraiser.
- As a class, write letters to your representative or other government leaders to urge them to set aside land for reserves, support conservation legislation, and develop ways to promote initiatives that will help endangered species
- Organize a 'clean-up day' event to remove litter from a local park or public land, helping children to understand the importance of maintaining a safe and clean environment for all living things



INTRODUCTION TO THEATER

Theater didn't develop overnight; it evolved slowly out of the practice of ritual. Primitive man developed certain rituals to appease the elements or to make things happen that he didn't understand (for example, to make crops grow or to have success in hunting). In Ancient Greece, similar rituals began in honor of Dionysus, the god of fertility, and would include choral singing and dancing. These rituals were so popular, that people began to choreograph, or plan out, the dances more carefully. The songs became more sophisticated, and eventually the rituals included actors speaking in dialogue with one another and with the chorus. Soon, writers wrote full scripts to be performed; entire festivals were organized in honor of Dionysus, and theater as we know it was born.

What makes a theatrical experience? Actors on a "stage" (which might be anything from a huge amphitheater to the front of a classroom) portray characters and tell stories through their movement and speech. But it's still not a theatrical experience until one more very important element is added. It's the presence of an audience—watching, participating, imagining—that makes it truly theater. Theater is the coming together of people—the audience and the actors—to think about, speak of, and experience the big ideas that connect us to our inner and outer worlds.

INTRODUCTION TO MASKS AND PUPPETS

In this production of *My Father's Dragon*, actors wearing animal **masks** portray all of the characters. Though masks are rare in American contemporary theater, they have been used since the very beginnings of theater. The early Romans used enormous masks that exaggerated human characteristics and enhanced the actor's presence in the huge amphitheaters of their day. Greek theater used masks that were human scale to designate tragic and comic characters. Masks have been used in the early Christian church since the 9th century and were revived during the Renaissance in Italy with the Commedia Dell' Arte. Theater throughout Asia has used masks to create archetypal characters, human and divine. In Balinese theatrical tradition, for example, masks keep ancient and mythological figures recognizable to a contemporary audience, preserving a rare and beautiful culture. Though used differently in every culture, the mask universally facilitates a transformation of the actor *and* the audience.

In Enchantment's productions we sometimes include very large or very small characters in our stories, so we use **puppets** to portray them. Similar to masks, puppets also have a long and esteemed history. They have been used to represent gods, noblemen and everyday people as well animals and mythical creatures. In the history of every culture puppets can be found, from the tombs of the Pharaohs to the Italian marionette and the English Punch and Judy. The Bunraku Puppet Theater of Japan has been in existence continuously since the 17th century. In the early days of Bunraku, the greatest playwrights preferred writing for puppets rather than for live actors!

Puppets are similar to the mask in their fascination and power. We accept that this carved being is real and alive, and we invest it with an intensified life of our own imagining. Thus, puppets can take an audience further and deeper into what is true. Audiences bring more of themselves to mask and puppet theater because they are required to imagine more. Masks and puppets live in a world of heightened reality. Used with art and skill, they can free the actor and the audience from what is ordinary and mundane, and help theater do what it does at its best: expand boundaries, free the imagination, inspire dreams, transform possibilities, and teach us about ourselves.

EXPERIENCING LIVE THEATER

Preparing to See the Play

Audience members play an important role—it isn't a theater performance until the audience shows up! When there is a “great house” (an outstanding audience) it makes the show even better, because the artists feel a live connection with everyone who is engaged in the performance. The most important quality of a good audience member is the ability to be engrossed with what's happening on stage. Sometimes it's important to be quiet, but other times, it's acceptable to laugh, clap, or make noise!

Parents and teachers—we welcome children's spontaneous reactions, enthusiasm and laughter! An engaged, excited child behaves in relation to what's happening on stage. Although there are some simple guidelines that contribute to the best experience for the audience, we prefer that children are free to engage in the show spontaneously; it is our intent that they will be swept up in the magic of live theater and we believe that their behavior will be completely appropriate to that experience.

A Few Simple Guidelines

Attention: Theater is a shared experience. The performers focus their attention and energy on stage to share the play with the audience. The audience focuses their energy and attention on the play's action, supporting the performers so they can do their best work. Being attentive engages you in the performance and shows respect for the actors and the audience around you.

Quiet: Before the play begins there will be a recorded pre-show announcement asking everyone to turn off cell phones and refrain from unnecessary noise that might disturb their neighbors. The Theater is a very “live” space. This means that sound carries very well, usually all over the auditorium. Laughing and clapping are part of a live theater experience. But inappropriate sounds—whispering, rustling papers, or speaking—can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. This can distract everyone and spoil a performance. Please do not make any unnecessary noise that would distract the people sitting around you.

Turn it Off: The lights go down in the audience and up on the stage at the beginning of the play. If cell phones are still on, they light up the audience and are distracting to everyone. There is no video recording or photos allowed from the audience, so please, turn off all devices!

Appreciation: Applause is the best way for an audience in a theater to share its enthusiasm and to appreciate the performers. At the end of the program, it's customary to continue clapping until the curtain drops or the lights on stage go dark. During the curtain call, the performers bow to show their appreciation to the audience. If you really enjoyed the performance, you might even thank the artists with a standing ovation!

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Dewey, John, *Art as Experience*
Perigee Books

Dunn, Louise M. and Mills, Winifred H, *Marionettes, Masks and Shadows*
Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc.

Gannett, Ruth Stiles *My Father's Dragon*
Yearling, Random House Children's Books

Gannett, Ruth Stiles *Elmer and the Dragon*
Yearling, Random House Children's Books

Gannett, Ruth Stiles *The Dragons of Blueland*
Yearling, Random House Children's Books

Priestly, J.B., *The Wonderful World of the Theatre*
Rathbone Books Limited

