Passport TO CULTURE
Teacher’s Resource Guide
SCHOOL TIME PERFORMANCE SERIES • SCHOOL YEAR 2009-2010
Grades PreK-3

The Little Engine That Could
Omaha Theater Company

just imagine
NJPAC arts education

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The New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) Arts Education Department presents the 13th season of the Verizon Passport to Culture SchoolTime Performance Series.

With Passport to Culture, Verizon and NJPAC open up a world of culture to you and your students, offering the best in live performance from a wide diversity of traditions and disciplines. At NJPAC’s state-of-the-art facility in Newark, with support from Verizon, the SchoolTime Performance Series enriches the lives of New Jersey’s students and teachers by inviting them to see, feel, and hear the joy of artistic expression. The exciting roster of productions features outstanding New Jersey companies as well as performers of national and international renown. Meet-the-artist sessions and NJPAC tours are available to expand the arts adventure.

The Verizon Passport to Culture SchoolTime Performance Series is one of many current arts education offerings at NJPAC. Others include:

- Professional Development Workshops that support the use of the arts to enhance classroom curriculum
- Arts Academy school residency programs in dance, theater and literature, and Early Learning Through the Arts—the NJ Wolf Trap Program
- After-school residencies with United Way agencies

In association with statewide arts organizations, educational institutions, and generous funders, the Arts Education Department sponsors the following arts training programs:

- Wachovia Jazz for Teens
- The All-State Concerts
- The Star-Ledger Scholarship for the Performing Arts
- The Jeffery Carollo Music Scholarship
- Summer Youth Performance Workshop
- Young Artist Institute
- NJPAC/New Jersey Youth Theater Summer Musical Program

Students have the opportunity to audition for admission to NJPAC’s arts training programs during NJPAC’s annual Young Artist Talent Search.

Detailed information on these programs is available online at njpac.org. Click on Education. The Teacher’s Resource Guide and additional activities and resources for each production in the Verizon Passport to Culture SchoolTime Series are also online. Click on Education, then on Performances. Scroll down to “Download Teacher Guide in Adobe Acrobat PDF format” and select desired guide.

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To Teachers and Parents

The resource guide accompanying each performance is designed

- to maximize students’ enjoyment and appreciation of the performing arts;
- to extend the impact of the performance by providing discussion ideas, activities, and further reading that promote learning across the curriculum;
- to promote arts literacy by expanding students’ knowledge of music, dance, and theater;
- to illustrate that the arts are a legacy reflecting the traditional values, customs, beliefs, expressions, and reflections of a culture;
- to use the arts to teach about the cultures of other people and to celebrate students’ own heritage through self-expression;
- to reinforce the New Jersey Department of Education’s Core Curriculum Content Standards in the arts.
Trains have fascinated children and certainly many adults for over 100 years. They capture our imaginations and make us dream of faraway places. The lure of the train has also captured many writers’ imaginations—especially writers of children’s stories. One story in particular, *The Little Engine That Could*, has been around almost as long as there has been a train to tell a story about.

Many people believe that *The Little Engine That Could* story provides a useful exemplar for children that teaches them to avoid giving up on things too easily. In the tale, a long train is carrying toys for girls and boys who live on the other side of a mountain. But, when the train comes to the foot of the mountain, it is unable to go any further. A number of large engines that come along are asked to pull the train, but for various reasons they all refuse. The request is then made to a small blue engine. The Little Engine not only agrees to try, but through determination overcomes the seemingly impossible task of pulling the train over the mountain. Throughout the ordeal, the Little Engine repeats its mantra: “I think I can, I think I can.” While countless versions of the story have been told, the most famous is the 1954 retelling by Watty Piper.

Now, Watty Piper’s version of *The Little Engine That Could* has been adapted for children’s theater by the Omaha Theater Company. The company’s interactive production features giant trains, sassy life-sized toys (the Clown, the Teddy Bear, the Toy Monkey, the Red Dress Doll) and many delightful songs. During the performance, the audience plays a major role in helping the Little Engine make it over the mountain as they chant the famous phrase, “I think I can, I think I can!” As the Little Engine heads for success, the audience learns, according to James Larson, the company’s artistic director, that “small bodies can do big things if they think big and believe in themselves.”
The Omaha Theater Company, based in Omaha, Nebraska, was established as The Junior Theater in 1949. It is one of America’s longest running theaters dedicated to young audiences and – with extensive programs that reach nearly 500,000 young people each year – one of the leading presenters of children’s theater in the nation.

The Omaha Theater Company’s artists are all experienced in bringing their imaginations and the imaginations of children together. And, that is quite a powerful engine!

James Larson (Artistic Director) created the company’s adaptation of The Little Engine That Could. Larson has written several plays for young audiences, but he says that this one is “one of the most special shows I’ve written. I really enjoyed inventing the histories of each of the characters and making them tangible.” A member of the esteemed Iowa Writers’ Workshop, Larson received playwriting grants from the University of Minnesota’s Office of Advanced Drama Research and the Rockefeller Foundation for his work. His plays for both adults and children have been produced throughout the country and across Europe.

A lively, experienced cast brings Larson’s play to life. Jeff Haffner plays all the engines. His past roles with this company include Marley in A Christmas Carol and the Wizard in The Wizard of Oz. Jenny Guy, who plays the Clown, has done everything from light opera to Shakespeare and from improv comedy to children’s theater. The Little Engine That Could takes her on her first theatrical tour.

Having played Papa Bear in The Berenstain Bears Save Christmas and the Guard in The Wizard of Oz, Alphonse Kroeten now creates the Monkey in The Little Engine That Could. The Teddy Bear is Anthony Abdallah. An actor/educator at the Omaha Theater Company, Anthony has played Ryan in Disney’s High School Musical and Homer Zuckerman in Charlotte’s Wish as well as a Wickersham Brother in Seussical the Musical.

In this performance, Kirsten Rani Almeida makes her Omaha Theater Company debut as the Red Dress Doll. In addition, for over 20 years, she has performed in such shows as Stuart Little—the Musical, Beauty and the Beast, Annie, and The Sound of Music. When she’s not touring, Almeida teaches theater and improv at the Civic Theater School in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

The trains chugging across the stage come from the imagination of set designer Carl Dumicich, and the colorful costumes for the toys were created by Sherri Geerdes. Stuart Kenny wrote the music and lyrics.

Playing the children who live over the mountain? Why it is You! And with your help, the Little Engine will successfully deliver those toys.
actor - the person who interprets a role and performs it.

artistic director - the person who chooses the material and oversees the entire theatrical production. He or she coordinates the efforts of many people including the author, set designer, artisans, musicians, actors, and technicians.

choreographer - the artist who creates the concept for a dance, composes the steps and teaches the movement to the performers.

choreography - the arrangement of movement in space and time to create a dance.

composer - a person who creates original music.

dialogue - the lines spoken by two or more characters in a play or narrative.

director - the person who conceives of the overall concept for a production, supervises all elements of the production and guides the actors in their performances.

improv (improvisation) - composing or performing music or acting without previous preparation.

lighting designer - the person who creates a visual concept for a production through the design and use of illumination.

props - items used on stage to help create a sense of place such as an envelope, a flag or map; the belongings used by a character on stage such as a purse, hand mirror or sandwich.

scene - a division of a play in which the action is continuous; usually part of an act.

score - a written or printed piece of music showing all the vocal and/or instrumental parts; all of the music written for a particular opera, theater or dance production.

set - the arrangement of scenery and props on a stage to create the setting.

set designer - the person who designs the set.

setting - the place or mood in which a performance takes place.

A list of words about trains can be found online at nipac.org. Click on Education, then SchoolTime Performances. Scroll down and click on MORE: Teacher Guides and Curriculum Materials. Select the resource pages for The Little Engine That Could in PDF format.
Did You Know?

Little Engine Fun Facts

Variations of The Little Engine That Could have been published since the early 20th century, but the story was probably told for years before being circulated in print – probably since the mid-19th century when trains were first invented.

Did you know that...the little engine is a girl?

While early versions of The Little Engine That Could described the Little Engine as “it” (except for a 1912 story called Little Switch Engine in which the engine was a “he”), in the classic Watty Piper retelling, the Little Engine is female. What is interesting is that even though Watty Piper’s is the best known version of the story, people are usually surprised that the Little Engine is female. In 2000, Laura Moore, a professor of gender analysis in trains also became a standard character. Clown who tries to get help from the other engines took on individual personalities. The Clown who tries to get help from the other trains also became a standard character.

...there is no “Watty Piper?”

The name “Watty Piper” is a pseudonym for an author of many children’s books published by Platt and Munk. Over the years, several people have claimed authorship of the story.

...the same story is also called The Pony Engine?

The Pony Engine was the name of the little engine story when it appeared in the Kindergarten Review in 1910. After the classic Watty Piper story was published by Platt and Munk in 1954, the firm of Grosset and Dunlap prepared to publish its own version based on claims made by Elizabeth M. Chmiel that the story had been written by her cousin under the name of “Uncle Nat.” The court decided that Grosset and Dunlap could publish its story as The Pony Engine, and the tale was released by the company under this title in 1957. So if you know the Little Engine’s story by the title The Pony Engine, that is why.

...there is an “I think I Can” rail tour?

Beginning in 2000, a full-sized replica of the Little Engine has traveled across the United States every year. The tour is arranged by the Strasburg Railroad. See thelittleenginethatcouldtour.com/.

...the “I think I can” chant is heard in Walt Disney’s Dumbo (1941)?

In this movie version of Dumbo, watch for the circus train climbing up the hill!

...many artists have recorded this story?

The list of artists who have recorded the narrative of The Little Engine That Could includes Burl Ives, Boris Karloff, Anne Lloyd, the Sandpipers, Mitch Miller, and even Goofy!

...the story was chosen to be read to tens of thousands of children all over the world?

On August 24, 2006, the story of the determined Little Engine was part of Jumpstart Read for the Record, an international campaign to bring preschool children together with valued grownups in their lives to read the same book, on the same day, in communities all over the world. See readfortherecord.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about”

...it’s been a movie?

Of course it has! The best known Little Engine film was produced in 1991 by MCA/Universal Home Video. (In the film, the little engine’s name is Tillie.)

Oh, and one more thing...

Not everyone thinks they can all the time. And, not everyone needs to think they can succeed all the time. In Shel Silverstein’s poem Little Blue Engine, the engine almost gets to the top of the hill but slides back down. “If the track is tough and the hill is rough, THINKING you can just ain’t enough.” What do you think of this idea?
In the Classroom

Before the Performance

1. While reading *The Little Engine That Could* to the class, stop after each page and ask the youngsters what they think should happen next. Do they think the Little Engine will make it over the mountain? When the story is over, ask the students what their favorite parts were. Have them illustrate their favorite scenes. (1.1, 1.4) *

2. The train engines and toys depicted in *The Little Engine That Could* are treated anthropomorphically. Human characteristics are also attributed to the train engine characters in *Thomas and Friends* with which the students are most likely familiar from books, TV, DVDs, and toys. Read several *Thomas and Friends* stories to the class. Ask them how the engines in these stories are similar to the characters in *The Little Engine That Could*. Ask each child to choose a toy, and then, working in groups, create a skit in which the toys relate to each other as people would do. (1.1, 1.3)

Teaching Science Through Theater (K-8)

By Sharon J. Sherman, Ed.D.

Theater provides children with new experiences and allows them to see the world in different ways. Creative thought and the power of words bring imaginative new life to familiar objects, and a darkened theater can be transformed into a spatial canvas where new ideas germinate. A theatrical performance is also a wonderful way to introduce the concept of light, as objects are often illuminated, creating a sparkling world of drama and motion that captures the imagination.

In accordance with New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Science Standards, kindergartners should investigate light energy using one or more of their senses. Have the youngsters look for shadows on the playground at different times of the day and under different weather conditions. Then, ask them to create simple dramatizations to present their findings.

First and second graders learn that an object can be seen when light strikes it and is reflected to a viewer’s eye. If there is no light, objects cannot be seen. When light strikes substances and objects through which it cannot pass, shadows result. In the classroom, have the children apply a variety of strategies to collect evidence that if there is no light, objects cannot be seen. Have them present their evidence by acting out the relationship between a light source, a solid object and the resulting shadow. They should use variations of locomotor and nonlocomotor movement. (A locomotor movement involves moving from one place to another like running and sliding. A nonlocomotor movement is performed while remaining in one spot without going anywhere. Examples of non-locomotor movements are twisting, bending and swaying).

Third and fourth graders learn that light travels in straight lines. When light travels from one substance to another (air and water), it changes direction. Ask the students to create an improvisation to explain what happens when light travels from air into water. Fifth and sixth graders learn that light travels in a straight line until it interacts with an object or material. Light can be absorbed, redirected, bounced back, or allowed to pass through. They also learn that the path of reflected or refracted light can be predicted. Seventh and eighth graders learn that light energy from the sun is Earth’s primary source of energy, heating Earth’s surfaces and providing the energy that results in wind, ocean currents and storms. Have your students produce scripted scenes to illustrate these concepts.

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* Number(s) indicate the NJ Core Curriculum Content Standard(s) supported by the activity.

After the Performance

1. Ask students to name the characters in the Omaha Theater Company’s production of *The Little Engine That Could*. What were they like? How did each character behave? And, how did the Little Engine get over that steep hill? (1.1, 1.4)

2. Ask students to further describe what they saw and heard in the play. What was a favorite scene? Was it a different scene from the one they chose after reading the book? Can they act out the scene themselves? (1.1, 1.3, 1.4)

3. Ask the class to discuss what the play means to them. Is it just a story about a train? Discuss how positive thinking can help overcome obstacles. Was there something each of them once found very difficult to do, but after trying many, many times were finally successful? Have the class create skits to dramatize their personal experiences. (1.1, 1.3, 1.4)

* Additional Before and After activities can be found online at njpac.org. Click on Education, then SchoolTime Performances. Scroll down and click on MORE: Teacher Guides and Curriculum Materials. Select the guide and resource pages desired in PDF format.
Delving Deeper

Books for Students and Teachers


*Film*


*Websites*

[thelittleenginethatcouldtour.com](http://thelittleenginethatcouldtour.com/). *The Little Engine That Could* think I Can™Rail Tour.


Additional resources can be found online at njpac.org. Click on Education, then SchoolTime Performances. Scroll down and click on MORE: Teacher Guides and Curriculum Materials. Select the guide and resource pages desired in PDF format.

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