BEHIND THE CURTAIN

A CREATIVE & THEATRICAL STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Book, Music & Lyrics by Joan Cushing
Based on the book by Harry Allard and James Marshall
Directed by K. Doug Miller

RECOMMENDED FOR AGES 5 AND UP

JUNE 20 - JUNE 28, 2020 PUBLIC SHOWS

STUDENT MATINEES

DECEMBER 2 - DECEMBER 6, 2019 (MOODY PERFORMANCE HALL)

DECEMBER 9 - DECEMBER 13, 2019 (RICHLAND COLLEGE)

JUNE 30 - JULY 2, 2020 (ROSEWOOD CENTER)

As part of DCT's mission to integrate the arts into classroom academics, the ***Behind the Curtain Resource Guide*** is intended to provide helpful information for the teacher and students to use before and after attending a performance. The activities presented in this guide are suggested to stimulate lively responses and multi-sensory explorations of concepts in order to use the theatrical event as a vehicle for cross-cultural and language arts learning.

Please use our suggestions as springboards to lead your students into meaningful, dynamic learning; extending the dramatic experience of the play.

Your Family Arts Center
DALLAS CHILDREN'S THEATER
Astonishing kids & families with the fun of Broadway-like plays & much more!

Dallas Children's Theater

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

A Creative & Theatrical Resource Guide for Teachers

DCT Executive Artistic Director .....Robyn Flatt
Resource Guide Editor .....Jessica Colaw

Play .....MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY
Book, Music & Lyrics by .....Joan Cushing
Based on the book by .....Harry Allard and James Marshall

DALLAS CHILDREN'S THEATER, one of the top five family theaters in the nation, serves over 250,000 young people and their families from 197 zip codes, 101 cities and 89 counties and 27 states each year through its main stage productions, touring, educational programming and outreach activities. Since its opening in 1984, this award-winning theater has existed to create challenging, inspiring and entertaining theater, which communicates vital messages to our youth and promotes an early appreciation for literature and the performing arts. As the only major organization in Dallas focusing on theater for youth and families, DCT produces literary classics, original scripts, folk tales, myths, fantasies and contemporary dramas that foster multicultural understanding, confront topical issues and celebrate the human spirit.

DCT is committed to the integration of creative arts into the teaching strategies of academic core curriculum and educating through the arts. Techniques utilized by DCT artists/teachers are based upon the approach developed in *The Integration of Abilities* and *Making Sense with Five Senses* by Paul Baker, Ph.D.

DCT Founder and Executive Artistic Director, Robyn Flatt defines the artistic mission and oversees the operations of the organization, consisting of 38 full time staff members and nearly 200 actors, designers, theater artists and educators.

TEKS that your field trip to Dallas Children's Theater satisfies are listed at the back of this Resource Guide.

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CURTAINS UP ON PUTTING A PERFORMANCE TOGETHER

Every DCT performance you see is the result of many people working together to create a play. You see the cast perform on stage, but there are people behind the scenes that you do not see who help before, during, and after every production.

The DIRECTOR
Determines the overall look of the performance.
Guides the actors in stage movement and character interpretation.
Works with designers to plan the lights and sounds, scenery, costumes and make-up, and stage actions.

The DESIGNERS
Plan the lights, sounds, scenery, costumes, make-up, and actions to help bring the director's vision to life.
There are also designers who work to create the posters, advertisements, programs, and other media for the performance.

The STAGE MANAGER
Before the performance, they create a cue sheet to guide the crew in getting set pieces on and off the stage during the performances.
During the performance, the stage manager uses this cue sheet to direct people and things as they move on and off the stage.

The CREW
Build and operate the scenery, costumes, props, and light and sound during the performance.

The CAST
Includes all of the performers who present the story on stage.

The AUDIENCE
That's right! There can be no performance without you—the audience. The role of the audience is unique because you experience the entertainment with the performers and backstage crew.
You are a collaborator in the performance and it is important to learn your role so you can join all the people who work to create this Dallas Children's Theater production.

CURTAINS UP ON THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

Watching a play is different from watching television or a sporting event. When you watch T.V., you may leave the room or talk at any time. At a sporting event you might cheer and shout and discuss what you're seeing. Your role as a member of the audience in a play means you must watch and listen carefully because:

- You need to concentrate on what the actors are saying.
- The actors are affected by your behavior because they share the room with you. Talking and moving around can make it difficult for them to concentrate on their roles.
- Extra noises and movement can distract other audience members.

Are you ready for your role in this performance?
Check the box next to the statements that describe proper etiquette for an audience member.

- ❑ Try your best to remain in your seat once the performance has begun.
- ❑ Share your thoughts out loud with those sitting near you.
- ❑ Wave and shout out to the actors on stage.
- ❑ Sit on your knees or stand near your seat.
- ❑ Bring snacks and chewing gum to enjoy during the show.
- ❑ Reward the cast and crew with applause when you like a song or dance, and at the end of the show.
- ❑ Arrive on time so that you do not miss anything or disturb other audience members when you are being seated.
- ❑ Keep all hands, feet, and other items out of the aisles during the performance.

CURTAINS UP ON THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE (contd.)

1. Draw a picture of what the audience might look like from the stage. Consider your work from the viewpoint of the actors on stage. How might things look from where they stand?
2. Write a letter to an actor telling what you liked about his or her character.
3. Write how you think it might feel to be one of the actors. Are the actors aware of the audience? How might they feel about the reactions of the audience today? How would you feel before the play began? What about after the show ends?
4. Which job would you like to try? Acting, Directing, Lighting and Sounds, Stage Manager, Set designer, Costume designer, or another role? What skills might you need to complete your job?

CURTAINS UP ON THEATER VOCABULARY

ACTOR	any theatrical performer whose job it is to portray a character
CAST	group of actors in a play
CENTER STAGE	the middle of the stage
CHARACTER	any person portrayed by an actor onstage. Characters may often be people, animals, and sometimes things.
CHOREOGRAPHER	the designer and teacher of the dances in a production
COSTUME DESIGNER	the person who creates what the actors wear in the performance
DIRECTOR	the person in charge of the actors' movements on stage
DOWNSTAGE	the area at the front of the stage; closest to the audience
HOUSE	where the audience sits in the theater
LIGHTING DESIGNER	the person who creates the lighting for a play to simulate the time of day and the location
ONSTAGE	the part of the stage the audience can see
OFFSTAGE	the part of the stage the audience cannot see
PLAYWRIGHT	the person who writes the script to be performed. Playwrights may write an original story or adapt a story by another author for performance.
PLOT	the story line
PROSCENIUM	the opening framing the stage
PROJECT	to speak loudly
PROP	an object used by an actor in a scene
SET	the background or scenery for a play
SETTING	the time and place of the story
SOUND DESIGNER	the person who provides special effects like thunder, a ringing phone, or crickets chirping
STAGE CREW	the people who change the scenery during a performance
STAGE MANAGER	the person who helps the director during the rehearsal and coordinates all crew during the performance
UPSTAGE	the area at the back of the stage; farthest from the audience

CURTAINS UP AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Attending a play is an experience unlike any other entertainment experience. Because a play is presented live, it provides a unique opportunity to experience a story as it happens. **Dallas Children's Theater** brings stories to life though its performances. Many people are involved in the process. **Playwrights** adapt the stories you read in order to bring them off the page and onto the stage. **Designers and technicians** create lighting effects so that you can feel the mood of a scene. **Carpenters** build the scenery and make the setting of the story become a real place, while **costumers** and **make-up designers** can turn actors into the characters you meet in the stories. **Directors** help actors bring the story to life and make it happen before your very eyes. All of these things make seeing a play very different from television, videos, computer games, or CDs of stories.

TEACHER TIP • TEACHER TIP • TEACHER TIP •

Hold a class discussion when you return from the performance. Ask students the following questions and allow them to write or draw pictures of their experience at DCT.

- What was the first thing you noticed when you entered the theater?
- What did you notice first on the stage?
- What about the set? Draw or tell about things you remember. Did the set change during the play? How was it moved or changed?
- Was there any space besides the stage where action took place?
- How did the lights set the mood of the play? How did they change throughout? What do you think the house lights are? How do they differ from the stage lights? Did you notice different areas of lighting?
- What did you think about the costumes? Do you think they fit the story? What things do you think the costume designers had to consider before creating the costumes?
- Was there music in the play? How did it add to the performance?
- What about the actors? Do you think they were able to bring the characters to life? Did you feel caught up in the story? What things do you think the actors had to work on in order to make you believe they were the characters?

CURTAINS UP ON ADAPTATION

An adaptation is a change made in something so that it can fit a new use. This performance of MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY is an adaptation of a book, which is meant to be read, into a play, which is meant to be performed and viewed. Joan Cushing worked to take the story, created by Harry Allard and James Marshall, and adapt it so it could be performed for an audience onstage.

Consider these questions for discussion before you attend the performance:

- What kinds of things did Joan Cushing have to consider in creating a script from the book?
- What kinds of things would Harry Allard and James Marshall be concerned about with an adaptation of their book?
- What will the characters look like? How will they match their illustrations? How might they differ?
- What about the story? What changes might you expect in adapting it for the stage? Why would these changes be necessary?

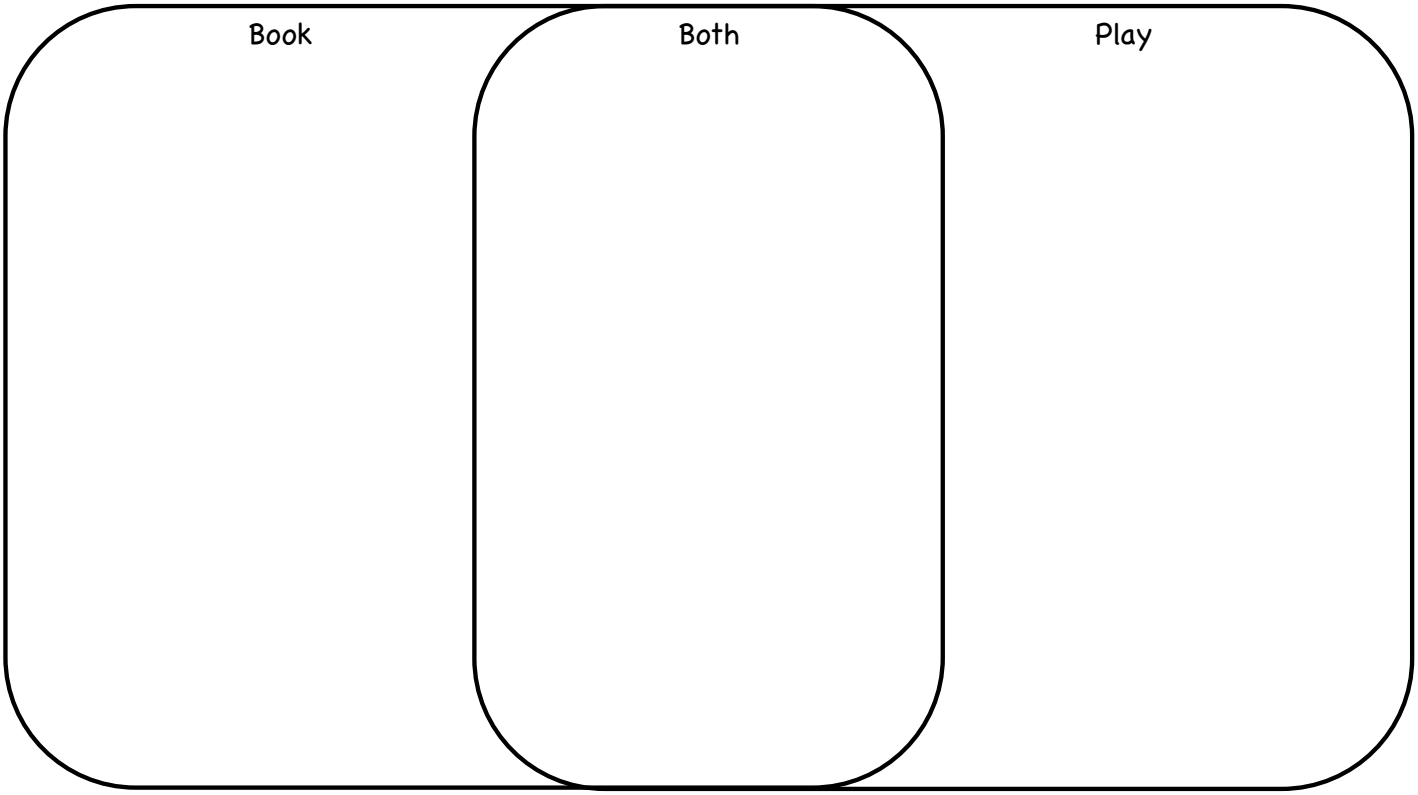
After the performance, consider these questions:

- Were there any characters, events or details that were in the book but not in the play? Why do you think these choices were made?
- Did the changes make the story stronger or was it weaker because of them?
- What do you think the set and costume designers need to consider when bringing the book to the stage?
- What things helped to tell the story onstage?

Use the following compare and contrast template to illustrate the similarities and differences between the book and DCT's performance of MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY.

MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY

Compare and Contrast



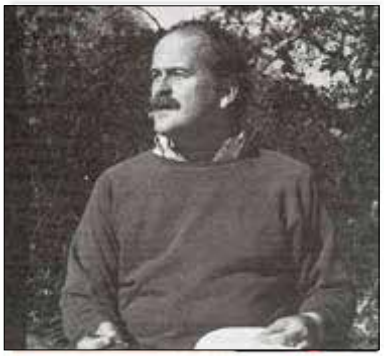
CURTAINS UP ON THE AUTHORS

HARRY ALLARD was born in Evanston, Illinois on January 27th. He grew up in California, Long Island and Chicago. He graduated from Northwestern College in 1943 and then performed active duty in Korea. He then lived in Paris for several years and became so fluent in the language that he got a master's degree and then a Ph.D. in French from Yale in 1973. He taught French at the college level for many years.

Upon his arrival in Boston, he met James Marshall, whose art and friendship inspired Allard's first book, *The Stupids Step Out*. This successful collaboration paved the way for the publication of other *Stupids* books and the *Miss Nelson* series. *Miss Nelson is Missing!* was voted one of the most memorable books of the century.

Mr. Allard lives and works in Massachusetts.

Adapted from https://www.kidsreads.com/authors/harry-g-allard



JAMES EDWARD MARSHALL (October 10, 1942 – October 13, 1992) was an American illustrator and writer of children's books, probably best known for the *George and Martha* series of picture books (1972–1988). He illustrated books exclusively as James Marshall; when he created both text and illustrations, he sometimes wrote as Edward Marshall. In 2007 the U.S. professional librarians posthumously awarded him the biennial Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal for "substantial and lasting contribution" to American children's literature.

Adapted from https://www.kidsreads.com/authors/james-marshall

CURTAINS UP ON THE PLAYWRIGHT

JOAN CUSHING has adapted 16 popular children's books as musicals, receiving over 400 productions and 5 national tours: *Miss Nelson Is Missing!*, winner of the 2003 Nat'l Children's Theatre Festival; *Junie B. Jones & a Little Monkey Business!*; *Miss Nelson Has a Field Day!*; *Petite Rouge: A Cajun Red Riding Hood* (2007 NY Musical Theatre Festival); *Heidi* (with playwright Martha King De Silva); and *George & Martha: Tons of Fun*, all commissioned by Imagination Stage. *Lawrence*, commissioned by Gabrielino High School; *Brave Irene*, commissioned by Adventure Theatre; and *Diary of a Worm*, a *Spider & a Fly*, commissioned by Oregon Children's Theatre. Other theaters which have produced her work include Seattle Children's Theatre, Childsplay Theatre, Omaha Theatre Co., Children's Theatre of Charlotte, Dallas Children's Theater, Orlando Shakespeare Festival, North Shore Music Theatre, South Coast Repertory, First Stage Milwaukee, Walnut Street Theatre, Stage One Louisville, Nashville Children's Theatre, Emerald City Theatre, Stages Theatre, Orlando Rep, Manhattan Children's Theatre, and California Theatre Center. According to TYA Magazine, she is "the most produced playwright in children's theater" and *Miss Nelson Is Missing!* is "the most produced play."

In 2002 she worked with Young Playwrights Theatre to help turn their play *Pieces of Life*, written by local middle school students, into a musical, which was performed at the Kennedy Center and toured the D.C. schools. She was also commissioned by Oak Crest High School to write a musical for 100 girls using Broadway songs, *Belles Are Ringing!*

Favorite works include a brand new script for *Tussaud*, based on the deliciously gruesome and dark tale of Madame Tussaud; *The Christmas Doll*, 2007 National Youth Theatre Award for Outstanding Play/Musical, Creative Loafing Nomination for Best Original Show, Outstanding Original Musical, Outstanding Musical Composition, Outstanding Production, adapted from the book by Elvira Woodruff, world premiere, Children's Theatre of Charlotte; *Lizzie Bright & the Buckminster Boy*, adapted from the book by Gary D. Schmidt, workshopped at First Stage Milwaukee (New Play Series), Growing Stage Co., and Playwrights Theatre of NJ; and *Ramana's Garden* based on true stories of children in an orphanage in N. India (with Kathy Carroll). Several new commissions include *Breast In Show*, produced by Eileen Mitchard with playwright Lisa Hayes and *101 Dalmatians* with playwright Martha King De Silva for Imagination Stage, with a double opening at Children's Theatre of Charlotte. Most recently Cushing wrote two new works for CTC (Children's Theatre of Charlotte): *Ella's Big Chance: a Jazz Age Cinderella* - a retelling of the age-old story by beloved London writer Shirley Hughes, set in the Roaring 20's, with a more empowered heroine and a surprise ending. *Ella* received its stunning premiere at CTC last season. This past season Cushing was commissioned by CTC to write a musical version of *Grace for President*, based on the book by popular children's writer Kelly Di Pucchio. *Grace* opened in October before the election, with a double opening at Aurora Theatre in Atlanta - two dynamite productions celebrating empowerment, making bold choices, and diversity. *Grace* opens this coming fall at Raleigh Little Theatre. Ms. Cushing lives in the nation's capital where all the crazy politics happens. Her husband, Paul Buchbinder, died of pancreatic cancer several years ago, but left her with three beautiful sons and four splendid grandsons.

Adapted from https://joancushing.com/bio.html

CURTAINS UP ON DISCUSSION

- How are the Tornadoes doing when the play begins?
- How do the other characters feel about their losing team?
- What happens at the practice with Coach Armstrong?
- Why do the kids think the Tornadoes are losing?
- What does Miss Nelson do to show the kids the football team's problem?
- What happens to Coach Armstrong?
- What happens when Mr. Blandsworth dresses up as Viola Swamp?
- How does Coach Swamp treat the football team?
- What does Mr. Blandsworth imagine is possible now that the football team is improving?
- Which historical figures does Miss Nelson mention when she tries to inspire her students? Why?
- What happens at the big Thanksgiving game?

CURTAINS UP ON LANGUAGE ARTS

Before MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY, *Miss Nelson Is Missing!*

As a class, read *Miss Nelson is Missing!* Hold a class discussion about the book.

Discussion starters:

- How do the students behave at the beginning of the story?
- What did the students think happened to Miss Nelson?
- Compare Miss Nelson to Viola Swamp.
- What changes in the students' behavior?
- How does this story compare to MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY?

Now it's your students' turn to guess what happened to Miss Nelson. Instruct them to imagine that they are in Miss Nelson's class, and either draw a picture or write a paragraph describing what they think might have happened to their missing teacher. After everyone is finished, ask for student volunteers to share their unique perspectives with the class.

Adapted from https://www.thoughtco.com/miss-nelson-is-missing-lesson-plan-2081080

CURTAINS UP ON WRITING

After reading *Miss Nelson is Missing!*, adapt the story into a play (just like Joan Cushing adapted MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY).

Work as a whole group and, with the book as your guide, create a script (include dialogue, stage directions, etc.) using student input. Ask students for suggestions about what to keep from the story and what to edit… perhaps your script will be pretty close to the original or maybe just loosely based on the book. "Workshop" the script: choose actors to read and act out the script. At this point, you may need to make adjustments as your class sees fit.

Have a class discussion about the script-writing process. What challenges did the class experience? What came easy during the process? How does the script compare to the book?

Joan Cushing actually wrote an adaptation of *Miss Nelson is Missing!* Look for videos online to see how your version compares.

Adapted from http://childdrama.com/lpplay.html

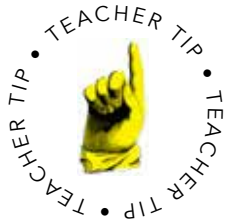
T.I. CORNER
CURTAINS UP ON MATH

At the beginning of MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY the football team is struggling to gain yards during the game. Did your students know that yards are an important measurement in the game of football?

Try this fun activity with the class, where students will explore measuring things around the classroom with traditional and nontraditional measurement devices, as well as see how long a yard truly is.

You will need:
- Rulers
- Nontraditional measurement devices (paper clips, piece of string, shoes, etc. – be creative!)
- Classroom items to measure
- Pencil and paper to record findings

Begin by discussing how "yards" are used in the game of football and show the class the length of a yard. Then tell your students that they will measure things around the room with rulers (counting by inches/feet/centimeter/etc.) and nontraditional measurement devices, as well. Divide the class into groups and give each group rulers and various other measurement tools (paper clips, pieces of string, etc.). Have the students walk around, working together to measure and record the length of items in the classroom. Then come back together as a whole group and ask the students to share their findings with the class.



Give students a yardstick or a yard-length of string so that they can see what in the classroom also equals a yard.

Created by Jessica Colaw

CURTAINS UP ON ART

When you come to Dallas Children's Theater to see a show, what do you see onstage? Everything you see has been thoughtfully designed by a set designer to help designate the setting of the story. If your class has already seen MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY, discuss the set design you saw onstage. If you haven't been to the theater yet, talk about what you think the set might look like.

Ground Plan DIY

Now it's your students' turn to play the role of set designer. One of the ways a set designer prepares the set is by creating a ground plan (a bird's eye view of the stage).

Instruct your students to utilize the following ground plan template to create a unique set for MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY. How would they show the school? The football field? Is there anything else they think they need to include? When the students have completed their projects, put the ground plans up around the classroom and have a gallery walk to check out everyone's different viewpoints.

Created by Jessica Colaw

MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY Ground plan

CURTAINS UP ON A PEP RALLY

In MISS NELSON HAS A FIELD DAY, Miss Nelson suggests to her student Lauren that a pep rally would be a great way to support the team. Is there anyone in your class or in your school who could use a little pepping up? Perhaps there is a big test coming up soon? Or someone has been out sick for a while? Find a good reason to hold a classroom (or school) pep rally and encourage your students or schoolmates!

Discuss the purpose and details of a pep rally. Divide the students into teams and assign each team a task (like creating posters, writing chants, etc.). Allow plenty of time for each team to complete its part. Schedule a good time to hold the pep rally and don't forget to have F-U-N!

Created by Jessica Colaw

CURTAINS UP ON TEAMWORK

Try one of the following activities to help inspire your students to work as a team, just as Miss Nelson did while disguised as Coach Swamp.

If You Build It…
This team-building game is flexible. Simply divide students into teams and give them equal amounts of a certain material, like pipe cleaners, blocks, or even dried spaghetti and marshmallows. Then, suggest an object to construct. The challenge can be variable (think: Which team can build the tallest, structurally sound castle? Which team can build a castle the fastest?).

Minefield
Another classic team-building game. Arrange some sort of obstacle course and divide students into teams. Students take turns navigating the "mine field" while blindfolded, with only their teammates to guide them. You can also require students to only use certain words or clues to make it challenging or content-area specific.

4-Way Tug-of-War
That playground classic is still a hit — not to mention inexpensive and simple to execute. For a unique variation, set up a multi-directional game by tying ropes in such a way that three or four teams tug at once. Some teams might choose to work together to eliminate the other groups before going head-to-head.

A Shrinking Vessel
This game requires a good deal of strategy in addition to teamwork. Its rules are deceptively simple: the entire group must find a way to occupy a space that shrinks over time, until they are packed creatively like sardines. You can form the boundary with a rope, a tarp or blanket being folded over or small traffic cones.

Games excerpted from https://www.teachthought.com/critical-thinking/10-team-building-games-that-promote-critical-thinking/

CURTAINS UP ON MORE

More collaborations from Harry Allard and James Marshall:
Miss Nelson Is Back
The Stupids Step Out
The Stupids Have a Ball
The Stupids Take Off
It's So Nice to Have a Wolf Around the House

T.E.K.S. SATISFIED

117.104 – Theatre, Kindergarten

- b.5 – Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.

117.107 – Theatre, Grade 1

- b.5 – Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.
  A – Discuss, practice, and display appropriate audience behavior.
  B – Discuss dramatic activities.

117.110 – Theatre, Grade 2

- b.5 – Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.
  A – Discuss, practice, and display appropriate audience behavior.
  B – React to and discuss dramatic activities.

117.113 – Theatre, Grade 3

- b.5 – Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.
  A – Apply appropriate audience behavior consistently.
  C – Discuss the use of music, movement, and visual components in dramatic activities and performances

117.116 – Theatre, Grade 4

- b.5 – Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.
  A – Apply appropriate audience behavior at formal and informal performances.
  C – Discuss how movement, music, or visual elements enhance ideas and emotions depicted in theatre.

117.119 – Theatre, Grade 5

- b.5 – Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances.
  A – Analyze and apply appropriate audience behavior at a variety of performances.
  C – Identify and discuss how movement, music, or visual elements enhance ideas and emotions depicted in theatre.