

STUDY GUIDE

The Little Engine That Could

About the Play:

The Little Engine is a stage adaptation of story that dates back to a preacher's sermon in the late 1800's. The version you will see at the Birmingham Children's Theatre was written especially for you by Mrs. Jean Pierce in 2011. The production has music by Mr. Jay Tumminello, scenery designed by Mr. Andy Behrle and Costume Designs by Mr. Todd Roberts.

Summary and Characters:

The Little Engine tells of a small train engine that proved she could overcome anything with courage and good thoughts. At Birmingham Children's Theatre, you will meet the Little Engine herself, a circus monkey named Jim Bo, Lorenzo the lion, two circus dogs, a sleek locomotive named Sylvia, a strong engine named Gordo the Great and a tired old engine named Rusty. You will find out that there are many different versions of the same story. They all have the same meaning, but don't always tell it the same way.

Settings:

A train yard.

Themes:

Believe in yourself

Courage

The Golden Rule

Asking for Help

Being a Hero

Perseverance





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Classroom ACTivities : 1

Comparing different version: *The Little Engine* : **Grades Pre-K to 2nd**

Language Arts Skills Addressed: *Making Connections, Sequence of Events, Building Background Knowledge, Compare and Contrast, Story Elements.*

The Little Engine, like many tales, has different versions that have been handed down through the tradition of oral and written literature. You and your class will see a version of *The Little Engine* on stage at Birmingham Children's Theatre.

Pre-performance ACTivities:

- 1) With your class, read aloud the text of a version of *The Little Engine* that may be found at: http://ah_coo.tripod.com/engine_that_could.htm.
- 2) With your class, create a timeline that chronicles the important points of the story's sequence of events. Keep this timeline to use after you come to the theatre.

Performance ACTivities:

- 3) Explain to your class that they will see a "version" of story you read in class.
- 4) As they watch the show, ask them to quietly think about how the story and the play are similar (like each other) or different (not alike).
- 5) At the performance, remember that the actors love to hear laughter when they do or say something funny, but please, no talking or whispering during the performance unless you are helping the actors.
- 6) It is rude to chew gum, eat or have a drink in the theatre.
- 7) For the actors' safety, do not use cameras, laser pointers or recording devices during a performance. It is also rude to use a cell phone, iPod, Blackberry or beeper during the show.
- 8) Actors love to hear applause! Show your appreciation by clapping at the end of the play.

Post-performance ACTivities:

- 9) After seeing the production, you can excite your class's imagination and creativity by discussing: **character**, someone in a book, play, or movie; **compare**, to examine two or more people or things in order to discover similarities; **contrast**, to examine two or more people or things in order to discover differences; **non-traditional**, not based on tradition (a certain way of doing things); **scene**, a small part of a story that occurs in one time and place; **setting**, the time and place of a story; **traditional**, handed down from one generation to the next.
- 10) Let each student tell his/her favorite thing about the play.
- 11) With your class, make a timeline that chronicles the important points of the play's sequence of events.
- 12) Using the timeline you created based on the story and the one based on the play, allow volunteers to discuss the similarities and differences that they see in the two versions.
- 13) End with applause!

Classroom ACTivities : 2a

Hand/Eye Coordination : **Grades PK-3**

Pre/Post Performance ACTivity:

Matching

The Little Engine works up an appetite chugging up the big mountain. Help her and her animal friends get something to eat by matching their pictures with their favorite food.



Horse

Coal



Monkey

Hay



Train

Peanuts



Elephant

Banana





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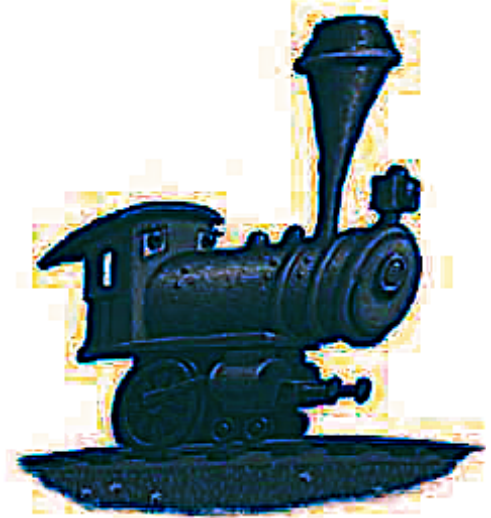
Classroom ACTivities : 2b

Early Mathematics : **Grades PK-2**

Pre/Post Performance ACTivity:

Counting

The Little Engine is a happy little train. Her cars are full of good things for boys and girls. Can you count how many of each toy she is bringing?





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Classroom ACTivities : 2c

Hand/Eye Coordination : **Grades PK-3**

Post-Performance Activity:

There were some characters in the play you saw that are not in the story you read with your class. In the space below, draw a character that you remember seeing in the play who was not in the story.



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Classroom ACTivities : 3

Understanding Theme : *The Little Engine* : **Grades 1 - 2**

Pre-Performance Activities:

Begin the class discussion by asking “What do you think of when you hear the word “theme?” What does it sound like to you?” Then create with the class a working definition of the word theme, based on the definition: the big idea or main message of the story. Help them understand by offering suggestions similar to the ones listed at the beginning of the study guide. Ask them “How do you experience themes every day?” At home, at school, at church, on the playground? Let each child give an example for the class.

Performance ACTivities:

- 3) Explain to your class that they will see a “version” of story of *The Little Engine*.
- 4) As they watch the show, ask them to quietly think about themes that they see in the play.
- 5) At the performance, remember that the actors love to hear laughter when they do or say something funny, but please, no talking or whispering during the performance unless you are helping the actors.
- 6) It is rude to chew gum, eat or have a drink in the theatre.
- 7) For the actors’ safety, do not use cameras, laser pointers or recording devices during a performance. It is also rude to use a cell phone, iPod, Blackberry or beeper during the show.
- 8) Actors love to hear applause! Show your appreciation by clapping at the end of the play.

Post-performance ACTivities:

- 9) After seeing the production, you can excite your class’s imagination and creativity by discussing the themes they felt in the play.
- 10) Ask what the theme “believe in yourself” means. How does it apply to the Little Engine and the other characters in the story and play? Expand the dialogue using other themes.
- 11) With art supplies, let your students draw a picture of a time when they were judged by the way they may have been dressed, how their hair looked, maybe even by the people they know. Expand using other themes.
- 12) Encourage the class to share their art work and the story it tells with the class.
- 13) End with applause!



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Classroom ACTivities : 5

Post-Performance ACTivity: Writing Comprehension: *The Little Engine* : **Grades 1 - 2**

Dear (who was your favorite character?) _____,

I am (how old are you?) _____ **and am in the** _____ **grade at** (to what school do you go?) _____.

I came to see you on stage in *The Little Engine* at _____ (where?)

on _____ (date) _____ (month) _____ (year)!

I thought the play was (how did it make you feel and why?) _____
_____.

My favorite part of the play was (what was something that was real to you?) _____
_____.

I really liked your character because (what was it that made you like them?) _____
_____.

The set looked like (what did you see?) _____.

The music sounded like (what did you hear?) _____.

Something else that I really loved about the play was _____
_____.

I would like to come back to a Birmingham Children's Theatre play and see (what is a play that you think is fun?) _____.

Love,



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**Birmingham Children's Theatre is the resident professional theatre company
at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex.**

Founded in 1947, BCT is one of the nation's oldest continuously run children's theatres.

**BCT has decades of making a positive difference in the lives of over
twelve million of our children.**

Dane Peterson

Director of Education and Production

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