



**NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS  
SILVER'S SECRET STUDY GUIDE**

**SUMMARY**

**SILVER'S SECRET**  
by Charlotte Nixon

Directed by Paul Bower  
Assistant Director: Lee Megill  
Costumes by Jaime Pardo

Dear Teachers,  
Welcome to New Mexico Young Actors production of ***Silver's Secret***. We are offering this study guide as a way to help you prepare your classes for our upcoming production. Included in this guide are a synopsis of our story, a list of characters, a vocabulary list and lesson ideas, as well as some audience protocol reminders. We always enjoy hearing from you and your students and look forward to receiving any pictures, stories, or comments about the production. Thank you for your interest and support of New Mexico Young Actors. We look forward to seeing you soon!

**Synopsis**

The play, *Silver's Secret*, is an original story written by Charlotte Nixon and published by Pioneer Drama Service in 2015. The play tells the story of the peg-legged pirate, Long John Silver, and his three bumbling offspring, who he sends away to find his hidden treasure. Long John Silver is recognizable as a character from the famous novel, *Treasure Island*, published in 1883, and written by Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson.

The play opens with Long John on his deathbed. He commands his servant, Old Smee, to gather his three children around him so that he can share with them his last wishes. The children arrive and we immediately realize that they are silly and foolish and not at all "good" pirates. Black Beard is confused and can't keep his servant, Black Beard Smee, under control. Red Beard is infamous for sinking his own ship at sea, and No Beard (Long John's only daughter), allows her ship to be attacked by seagulls. Before passing away, Long John tells the three offspring about his hidden treasure, gives each of them a map, and instructs that whomever finds the keys and the treasure first gets to keep the booty!

The next three scenes feature each of the children in a different location looking for the keys to the treasure. Black Beard ends up in Mermaid Lagoon with the superficial mermaid cheerleaders, Red Beard lands in the mysterious Shipwreck Cove, with the scary Lost-at-Sea Souls, and No Beard finds her way to Smuggler's Inn, where she's challenged to a tense game of Liar's Dice. All three manage to acquire a key and meet on a deserted island where the treasure is to be found. Surprisingly, the treasure is actually three chests, that when opened, reveal something much more valuable than gold and silver.

## **Cast of Characters**

**Long John Silver**, aging pirate and loving father

**Old Smee**, Long John's first mate, a true friend

**Black Beard**, Long John's oldest child, entitled

**Black Beard's Smee**, Black Beard's whiny first mate

**Red Beard**, Long John's middle child, dramatic

**Red Beard's Smee**, Red Beard's rude first mate

**No Beard**, Long John's little girl

**No Beard's Smee**, No Beard's first mate

**The Mermaids**, cheerleaders

**The Lost-At-Sea Souls**, ghosts

**The Smugglers**, other pirates

**Molly**, tough owner of the Smuggler's Inn

## **CLASSROOM DISCUSSION (PRE-PERFORMANCE)**

1. *How many of you have experienced a live dramatic performance? What did you see?*

2. *What are some of the differences between seeing a live performance and watching television or going to a movie?*

- Theater features live actors on-stage. They have spent many weeks rehearsing for the performance.
- The audience is a very important part of the performance. Appreciation and enthusiasm for the performers is shown by close attention and participation and applause at the proper times. The success of the play often depends on the audience.
- The atmosphere of a live performance is entirely different from your home, where the television is always available.
- It is easy to identify with live actors. You can see how they use their bodies and voices to convey different emotions.
- Actors wear costumes and make-up to help create the impression of the characters they play.
- There is much more to most live performances than actors. Special sets, effects, lighting, music, costumes, and of course, the audience add to the total experience.

3. *Introduce your students to the following theatrical terms:*

Box Office • Acts & Scenes • Producer • Program • Costumes • Props • Director • Stage • Curtain Call • Stagehand • Lobby • Usher • Musical Theater • Orchestra Pit • Playwright • Scenery • Makeup • Actor • Balcony • Play

4. *Introduce your students to the following shipping and pirate terminology found in our comedy:*

Sirens (from Greek mythology), scalawag, cutlass, kraken, Davy Jones, "dance the hempen jig," grog, plunder, gunwales, spyglass, landlubbers, buckaroos, maroon, poop deck, loot, rigging, weigh anchor, reef, booty, cat o' tails, swashbuckling, first mate, manicure, Neanderthal, plausible, foreboding, scurvy, Liar's Dice, stern, rapscallion, wager

## THEATER ETIQUETTE

*Discuss the role of the audience and proper theater etiquette.*

- Arrive on time so that you do not miss anything and so that you will not disturb the rest of the audience while trying to get comfortable. Lights may go out before the performance begins and seating is very difficult after that time.
- It is easier for you (and the rest of the audience) to see and hear the performance if you stay in your seat and listen very carefully.
- Try your best to remain in your seat once the performance has begun. There is no intermission during the performance of *Silver's Secret*, which is 50 minutes in length.
- Although you may wish to say something to the actors, you need to hold your thoughts, as you will disturb their concentration.
- Sing or participate *if and only if* you are invited to do so. Your participation is often very important.
- Show the cast and crew your appreciation for their hard work with applause. Do this when you like a song, dance, or joke.

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES (POST- PERFORMANCE)

1. *Write an Epilogue:* Predict what happened next in the story. Write an article in which you tell the readers what happened after the three pirates find the treasure. What happened to the other characters in the story? Be as specific as possible and keep with the spirit of the original story.
2. *Discuss real life situations that reflect the moral in Silver's Secret.*
  - a) Ask the children what stories they can come up with that illustrate what is truly valuable in life. How do we attach value to something? What about intangibles? It has been said that the most valuable things in life aren't things. Discuss.
  - b) Discuss the lesson that Long John Silver wanted to pass on to his children. Did the children learn that lesson in the end? What were some obstacles the children faced in accepting the surprise treasure?
  - c) Ask the students to create their own treasure box. They can include physical things that they find valuable such as toys, keepsakes, coins, or photos. Ask them to include a sheet of paper that lists things they are thankful for that are not physical objects, such as friendships, family, love, freedom, etc. Have the students share their boxes with the class.
  - d) The story of *Silver's Secret* creates an opportunity to talk about setting goals in life and working toward those goals. Ask your students to consider what kind of professions they might want to work in as grown ups. What kind of training will they need for those careers? Discuss concepts such as motivation, drive, ambition, and hard work.

3. *Music*: Was music used in the performance? Was it live or recorded? How could you tell? When was the music used? Why? Did it help develop the plot? What types of music were used, or were different types used? Can you describe how different kinds of music would make you have different kinds of feelings? When a play is a musical, an actor must have additional skills. Can you name some? A musical costs much more to produce. Can you name some additional expenses? (e.g., orchestra, a practice piano, a score, a choreographer, etc.)

4. *Sets*: Describe the sets used in the play you just saw. What props or details were used to suggest specific times or settings? How could lighting be changed to create a mood, season, time of day, etc.? What materials might have been used in building the sets? How were the sets and props moved on and off the stage? Describe a simple scene (a day in school, a trip to the mall, a ride in the car or on the bus) and ask students to describe a basic set for the scene.

5. *Costumes*: What would you need to know to create costumes for a play (research, sewing, theatrical effects, knowledge of fabric, etc.)? Why is the right costume important to the character in the play?

6. *Art activities*:

- Draw a picture of a favorite scene or character.
- Draw a picture of what the audience might look like from on-stage.
- Re-create a scene from the play using clay forms in a box.
- Design a program cover for the play using the title, date, and an illustration inspired by the play.
- Draw an advertisement for the play.
- Create a treasure chest. Have half of the class hide the chest and create a treasure map leading to the chest. The other half of the class can search for the chest using the map. Do it again, but vice versa!

7. *Language arts*:

- Choose a character that you liked and write a one-day's diary for that character. Write a letter to a cast member telling what you liked about her or his character.
- Discuss the play. Was there a hero or heroine? A villain? The setting? Was there a moral to the story?
- In 25 words or fewer, describe the plot of the play.
- Discuss the work of a movie/theater critic. Write a newspaper-type review of the play
- Read some famous pirate stories, such as *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie, or *The Gold Bug* by Edgar Allen Poe.

8. *Theater*

- Discuss live theater. Are the actors aware of the audience? Why might an actor change his presentation because of audience reaction? Would it be easy to be an actor? Conduct an interview with a classmate pretending to be one of the actors and find out the actor's feelings about being on stage, memorization, rehearsals, costumes, audience, etc.
- Make a list of all the personnel needed for a play (director, actors, musicians, author, designers—set, costumes, lights, sound—stagehands, choreographer, producer, etc). What do these different jobs contribute to the theatrical production?

9. *History*: Real pirates have been a part of history for centuries, and piracy on the high seas continues today. Have your students research a famous pirate from history. Where did he or she roam? What was the life of a pirate like? Did they really have buried treasure, maps, walking the plank, etc.?

## SILVER'S SECRET – INTERNET ACTIVITIES

Pirate Stories and Pirate History

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/pirates/>

<http://www.history.com/news/8-real-life-pirates-who-roved-the-high-seas>

<https://us.piratestorm.com/history-of-pirates>

There are many ideas for pirate crafts, games, maps, and more on Pinterest.

Much of this material is contributed with the kind permission of the *Cincinnati Children's Theater*, *Pioneer Drama Service*, and *Plays for Young Audiences*. This study guide was compiled by Billie J. Little, a former Board member of New Mexico Young Actors, Inc., and Paul Bower, Executive Director of NMYA.