



NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS Present:

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH, JR.

Words and Music by **Benj Pasek and Justin Paul**
Book by **Timothy Allen McDonald**
Based on the book by **Roald Dahl**

Directed by **Paul Bower**
Choreography by **Josh Megill**

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to New Mexico Young Actors production of *James and the Giant Peach*. We are offering this study guide as a way to help you prepare your classes for our upcoming production and your experience at the theater. Included in this guide are a historical note about Roald Dahl, a synopsis of our story, a list of characters, a vocabulary list and lesson ideas, as well as some audience protocol reminders. You may like to prepare your class with a discussion of what life was like in England in the mid-twentieth century. 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 at the KiMo!

HISTORICAL NOTE

Roald Dahl was born in Llandaff, Wales in 1916. Some of his early life experiences include the death of his father, a boarding school education, travel to North America and Africa, and enlisting as a fighter pilot during World War II, when he survived a plane crash and worked as a spy for MI6. By the 1950s, Dahl's stories were becoming popular, with his works featured on various television programs. Dahl had five children and enjoyed entertaining them and their friends with story time after lunch. It was during one of these sessions that the story of *James and the Giant Peach* was created. The story was published in 1961. In addition to his popular children's books, including *James and the Giant Peach*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964), *The BFG* (1982), and *Matilda* (1988), Dahl also wrote adult books and screenplays for *You Only Live Twice* and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Dahl died in 1990 at the age of 74.

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH SYNOPSIS

The story is introduced by Ladahlord, the narrator, in the opening prelude. The scene transitions into Painswick Orphanage, where James has a nightmare about losing his parents to a Rhino that escaped from the London Zoo. James interacts with the Grasshopper and Ladybug and sings a lovely ballad reminiscing about his home life. The Matron Nurse enters and tells James that he is going to live with his aunts in Dover. On a boardwalk in Dover, we meet Spiker and Sponge, the two evil aunts who survive by lying and stealing. They learn that they are to be the guardians of James and immediately determine how they can take advantage of him. Upon arriving at the aunts' cottage, James hopes for a day at the seashore. He is promptly informed by Spiker and Sponge that he will have to stay behind and chop down the dead peach tree in their front yard instead.

As James is ready to chop down the tree, he rescues the Earthworm, who is being chased by the Caterpillar. Ladahlord appears and tells James to pick a potion from a mysterious book of spells for the chance to change his future. James chooses the Slithering Crocodile Tongues and learns that whomever the potion touches first will receive its full power. In his excitement, James slips and the crocodile tongues scatter toward the tree and the insects. The next morning, Spiker and Sponge notice that a giant peach has grown on the peach tree.

Although gluttonous Sponge wants to eat it, Spiker sees the potential of the peach to make them rich. Reporters and Hollywood Agents show up offering Spiker and Sponge lucrative contracts for exclusives on the rare fruit.

Spiker and Sponge refuse to believe that James caused the peach to grow and leave him alone with the peach. James discovers a door to the peach and is sucked inside, coming face to face with five life-sized animals, the Grasshopper, Ladybug, Centipede, Spider, and Earthworm. The stem of the peach snaps and the fruit rolls across the English countryside, through Willy Wonka's famous chocolate factory, and into the sea. Back at the cottage, Spiker and Sponge realize the peach has disappeared and they are going to owe on the advances they received to promote the peach. They decide to take the money and skip town, narrowly avoiding an angry crowd.

Days later, Spiker and Sponge are cruising across the Atlantic on the Jewel of the Sea, on their way to New York City, when they spot their peach floating across the ocean. They decide to give chase. Back on the peach, the Centipede is seasick and attracts the attention of some seagulls. The peach has also attracted some sharks and James and the animals realize it won't be long before the peach will be devoured. James devises a plan to attract the seagulls by using the Earthworm as bait. When the seagulls are low enough, James will attach some of the Spider's web to the seagulls' talons and then to the stem of the peach, allowing the seagulls to take the peach into the air and away from the dangerous water. The seagulls fly the peach to New York City, where it is deposited on top of the Empire State Building. Spiker and Sponge, who are waiting for them, threaten to take the peach back to England. Before they make their move, the peach falls from the skyscraper and lands on the two aunts. They will never be able to hurt anyone again.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Ladahlord, charismatic, magical narrator

James, the hero

Ladybug, motherly to James

Grasshopper, optimistic leader of the animals

Spider, fun-loving older "sister" to James

Earthworm, outlandish character who saves the day

Centipede, grouchy "uncle" to James

Spiker, the brainy evil aunt

Sponge, the gluttonous evil aunt

Matron Nurse, runs the Painswick Orphanage

Karl Kreatour, part of James' nightmare

Billy and Bobby-Cop, Scotland Yard cops

Doreen Driggles, a vagrant supporting the aunts

Ridgley Rapsallion, another vagrant

Violet Funkschmeller, another vagrant

Chris Creyermouth, another vagrant

In addition, there are various ensembles throughout the musical, including the Zoo Crowd, Ladies' Garden Guild, Hollywood Agents, Reporters, Angry Crowd, Cruise Ensemble, and New Yorkers.

LESSON IDEAS

Classroom Discussion (Pre-Performance)

1. *How many of you have experienced a live theater performance? What did you see?*
 2. *What are some of the differences between going to the theater and watching television or going to a movie?*
- Theater features live on-stage actors. They have spent many weeks rehearsing for the performance.

- The audience is a very important part of the performance. Appreciation for the performers is shown by close attention, participation, and applause at the proper times. The success of the production often depends on the audience.
- The theater is a very special place. Its atmosphere 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 portray.
- 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.

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 in your seat. Lights go out before the curtain goes up 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.
- The KiMo Theatre is a historic building. Please respect and preserve the beauty of the KiMo by not bringing food and beverages (including water, gum and candy) into the theater. These items are permitted in the lobby only.
- There is no intermission during the performance, which is 75 minutes in length. Be sure to use the restroom before the performance begins.
- 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.
- Listen to how the music sets the mood and affects your own feelings.
- Show the cast and crew your appreciation for their hard work with applause. Do this when you like a song or dance or joke.
- Be sure to turn off *all* electronic devices and cell phones. Do not text during the performance. This is very inconsiderate to the performers and distracting to your fellow audience members.

Classroom Discussion and Activities (Pre or Post-Performance)

Reading/Writing

- Have a Roald Dahl month in your class. Have them read *James and the Giant Peach* and more of Dahl's books.
- Write a description of one of the characters and share it with a partner. After sharing, students can question each other about the ideas presented. This can be done with a drawing for lower levels.
- Have a creative writing session. Ask students to create their own fantastic story. Allow their imaginations to take over. This is how *James and the Giant Peach* was created!
- Have students write a question about a specific scene or character in the musical. They can ask the questions as a whole class activity or work in small groups.
- Assign a research project based on mid-20th-century England. The students can research orphanages, country estates, Scotland Yard, or journalism from the time period.
- Explore the relationship of protagonists and antagonists in classroom stories and draw a comparison to relationships in the musical, such as James and Aunts Spiker and Sponge, James and his animal friends, Spiker and Sponge to each other, as well as the animals to one another.

Vocabulary

The following are some words that are associated with *James and the Giant Peach*.

| | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
| Act | Plot | Set | Props | Downstage | Upstage |
| Program | Director | Producer | Fiction | Orphanage | Pounds |
| Quid | Telegram | Masseuse | Cellar | Primordial | Connoisseur |
| Exclusive | Advance | Expose | Daft | Bloomers | Scotland Yard |
| Boardwalk | Paparazzi | JFK Airport | Cliffs of Dover | | English Channel |

Science

- *James and the Giant Peach* presents a wonderful opportunity to study bugs—entomology!
- Explore the five creatures that are characters in the musical, Earthworm, Centipede, Grasshopper, Spider, and Ladybug. Identify similarities and differences.
- Create an observation journal about bugs, or small creatures, that are readily found in your local climate. Ask students to explore their backyards, local parks, and wilderness areas to find insects. Note identifying traits, movements, habitats, diets, and defense mechanisms. Offer bonus points for finding ladybugs, grasshoppers, spiders, earthworms, or centipedes!
- Although the five animal characters in *James and the Giant Peach* are identified as insects, only the grasshopper and ladybug fall under that classification. Discuss this with your students. What are the characteristics of insects? How are the spider, earthworm, and centipede classified?
- Consider the fantastic side of the bugs presented in the musical. Do bugs and other animals communicate? How do animals in their natural habitats coexist? If animals could speak to us, what would they say?

Art

- Create a class mural of the musical. Include the scenes from the story such as the English countryside, the ocean, the boardwalk, New York City. What were the details of each scene that made it believable from the audience's perspective.
- Draw a picture of a favorite scene or character.
- Re-create a New York City skyline or a train station using clay forms in a box.
- Draw an advertisement or program cover for the musical.
- Design stage scenery for *James and the Giant Peach* or another story that you would like to see on stage.

Music

- Ask the students to identify musical instruments that they heard in the musical. Discuss other instruments that could have been added for greater effect.
- Can you identify any recurring musical themes or motives in the music?
- How did the music express the action or emotion of the story (tempo, volume, range of notes, etc.)
- Did you hear any incidental music (purely instrumental music that functioned as background music for a scene change)?

Math

- Create a budget for a theatrical production. List all of the expenses involved (set design and materials, professional musicians, lighting design, props, costumes, theater rental, scripts, royalties, etc.). Discuss ways that a theater company might raise money to cover all of the expenses.
- Using a spreadsheet, create a rehearsal schedule for a theatrical production. Discuss how much time it might take for the cast to learn all of the staging and dancing. How many hours a day/week/month does it take to put on a production?
- Cite the statistics of the Empire State Building, one of the most famous landmarks in the United States. What is its height in inches and feet? Convert that to meters. How does it compare to other skyscrapers? When was it built? How long did it take? Note other historical facts and anecdotes.

History/Social Studies

- Discuss the ramifications of bullying with your class. Analyze how James was affected by the abuse of his awful aunts. Allow the students to journal their thoughts.
- Compare and contrast James' relationship with his aunts versus his relationship with his insect friends. What makes the relationships healthy or dysfunctional?
- Create a scene in your classroom. Assign students to play vagrants, cruise passengers, zoo goers, Hollywood agents, reporters, and have them interact with each other.
- Explore 20th century British history. Create small groups and assign each group a different decade on which to research and report.

SOURCES

Internet

www.roalddahl.com

www.kids.nationalgeographic.com

www.bugfacts.net

www.historyofengland.net

www.britannia.com

www.esbnyc.com

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. Copyright 2017. All Rights Reserved.