



## *The Jungle Book* **Study Guide**

by Joel Gelpe, Executive Director, NMYA

Dear Teachers,  
NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS present: *The Jungle Book*—  
the musical,  
based on the books ‘The Jungle Book’ and ‘The Mowgli Stories’  
by Rudyard Kipling.  
New Songs and Lyrics by Gerald V. Castle and Michael C.  
Vigilant, with Book by Vera Morris  
Directed by Joel Gelpe  
Choreographed by Michelle Eiland

Welcome to New Mexico Young Actors’ production of *The Jungle Book*—the musical. 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 the story, a synopsis of the musical, a list of characters, a vocabulary list and curriculum ideas, and 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 support of New Mexico Young Actors. We look forward to seeing you at the National Hispanic Cultural Center.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND INFO

Most Americans, especially kids, know *The Jungle Book* from the many film versions of the story, starting with the 1967 Disney animated movie and including a 1993 live-action version starring Jason Scott Lee as Mowgli, the jungle boy who was raised by wolves

These various versions are all based, of course, on the 1894 novel by the Nobel Prize-winning English writer Rudyard Kipling. Kipling, an Englishman, lived most of his life in India. In fact that’s where he was born—in the city of Mumbai. Thus, India is where he placed his many stories about Mowgli the “boy-cub” and his animal friends and (enemies).

When Kipling's book was first published, many readers wondered where he got his idea for a boy who was somehow abandoned by humans and ended up living in the wild, raised by wolves and living among a variety of animals.

In fact, Kipling took his inspiration from an *actual report* of such a person. You can read about him here:

<https://historyofyesterday.com/this-is-the-real-life-mowgli-c299d04296dd>

## SYNOPSIS

*The Jungle Book* — the musical

**A**fter an overture, played on the sitar, which is a special musical instrument used in a lot of music from India, we meet the main character of the story, Mowgli. He is very confident and not afraid of anything. He introduces himself by singing the song “Keeper of the Law.” The song tells us the rules for animal behavior in the jungle.

Then, we meet two of the humans in our story—Nyra the story teller, and her friend Chitra. Nyra knows why teachers and students are in the jungle audience: They want to hear Nyra tell the story of Mowgli, “the Little Frog.” Although the pesky, silly mongoose Rikki-Tikki-Tavi shows up and annoys Nyra, she dismisses him and gets back to her storytelling.

It's almost as if she casts a spell on us and takes us back in time, when Mowgli was a little boy and his name was Nathoo. Nyra introduces most of the jungle creatures. Even Shere Khan the tiger shows up. He is ferocious, and most animals and humans fear him. Even though Shere Khan is the biggest and strongest animal in the jungle, he is not in charge. Father Wolf is the leader of the animals. But Shere Khan thinks Father Wolf is

too old, too weak and slow, and that only he, the great Shere Khan, should be in charge.

Suddenly there is an emergency! Nathoo's mother, Messua, is very upset—she can't find her baby boy Nathoo. The people of the village look for him but can never find him.

**I**t is now twelve years later. The villagers gave up the search long ago, and Messua got used to life without her son. Meanwhile, in the jungle, Nathoo has been given the name "Mowgli," which means Little Frog. Mowgli has learned how to live as a respectful and respected jungle creature, and he proves it by singing the song "Jungle Law." He inspires all the animals to sing along. Suddenly, there is disturbing news — Father Wolf missed his kill. This means that he tried to catch another animal so that his family could eat, but he failed. If the leader of a family is unable to "put food on the table," then the whole family is at risk. And now the other animals are beginning to worry that Father Wolf is too slow and weak to be their leader.

**S**here Khan makes his argument again — that Father Wolf should give up his position of leadership and appoint Shere Khan to be the leader. He even sings the song "Can't We Be Friends?" to prove that he's a good guy, and that everyone should trust him. But Mowgli sticks up for Father Wolf and tells him he must never step down as leader of the jungle animals.

To lighten the mood, the monkeys sing a silly song about how happy they are to be monkeys. It's called "The Monkey Song." Just for fun, the silly monkeys take Mowgli prisoner and won't release him until he tells them the "secret" of the "Red Flower,"

which is jungle talk for “fire.” They don’t understand how fire can be both good and bad.

**M**owgli makes the short journey to the nearby village, perhaps to learn more about the magic of fire. The villagers teach Mowgli by singing the song “Red Flower.” Now Mowgli knows how to embarrass and defeat Shere Khan — by taunting him with Red Flower. Sure enough, the “fearless” Shere Khan is afraid of one thing: fire.

**B**ack in the jungle, with Shere Khan no longer a threat, Father Wolf proclaims Mowgli to be their Leader, until his oldest Wolf Son is old enough and wise enough to take over. Mowgli’s human mother, Messua, comes to the jungle and recognizes Mowgli as her long-lost Nathoo. She wants him to come home with her, but Mowgli replies, “I *am* home. The jungle is my home. But I will visit you often.”

All the animals and humans realize that they have much in common as they sing together —

We are of one blood, Ye and I,  
We share the same land, water and sky.  
It is “Jungle Law.”

## CHARACTERS

Your students are going to love meeting all the animals of the Indian jungle. They are all played by young actors, some of whom might actually be the same age as your students. Those characters are:

Mowgli, (“MOE-gee”) the jungle boy. Sometimes he is referred to as the “man-cub” or “the little frog.”

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi, the silly, mischievous mongoose

Baloo, (“bah-LOO”) the kindly bear

Bagheera, (“bah-GEER-ah”) the panther

Father and Mother Wolf, who raised Mowgli

Tabaqui, (“TAH-bah-kee”) the jackal

Kaa, (“KAH”) the python

Mang, the bat

Mor, the peacock

Queen Monkey and her silly monkey friends

Cobra, the snake and guardian of “the great treasure”

and of course Shere Khan, the fierce and villainous tiger, and enemy of Mowgli.

There are also human characters who live in the village at the edge of the jungle. They are:

Nyra, (“NEYE-rah”) an old lady and storyteller

Chitra, (“CHIH-trah”) a woman of the village

Messua, (meh-SOO-ah”) Mowgli’s human mother

Toomai, (“too-MY”) village elder

## VOCABULARY

abdicate

inquisitive

banish

rogue

blunt

scavenger

conversing

sitar

dry season

spat

## PROJECT IDEAS

**H**ave your students go to youtube and find video clips of the different animals listed above. Each animal has its own special voice and way of moving. In fact, each of our New Mexico Young Actors did this same assignment to help them create their animal characters.

**S**chedule a couple of movie days to watch some of the many movie versions of The Jungle Book. For example:

- the 1967 animated Disney musical version
- the 1994 live-action version starring Jason Scott Lee as a more mature, teenaged Mowgli (rated PG)
- the 2018 live-action Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle (also rated PG)

Then discuss the differences among the various versions, including the musical performed by New Mexico Young Actors

## 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.

- You will be watching *The Jungle Book* in the Albuquerque Journal Theatre. It's part of the National Hispanic Cultural Center, which is a beautiful place where people can take classes, study history, and go to see concerts, movies and musical plays like *The Jungle Book*. The theatre where you'll be watching the show is one of three theatres that make up the Roy E. Disney Center for Performing Arts. The Disney Center has three different theatres under one roof!
- Please respect and preserve the beauty of the Journal Theatre by not bringing food and beverages (including gum and candy) into the theater. These items are permitted in the lobby only.
- There is no intermission during the performance, which is a little more than one hour long. 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 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, 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.