



NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS

present

Disney's Little Mermaid, Jr.

Music by Alan Menken

Lyrics by Howard Ashman and Glenn Slater

Book by Doug Wright

TEACHER STUDY GUIDE

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to New Mexico Young Actors' production of ***Little Mermaid, Jr.*** 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 KiMo!

HISTORICAL NOTE

In 1835, the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen published his first collection of short stories: *Fairy Tales, Told for Children*. Two years later, the second edition featured a new story about a little mermaid. As the youngest daughter of the Sea-King, the mermaid witnesses a terrible storm and saves a young prince from drowning. She falls in love with the prince and trades away her voice the evil Sea-Witch for a chance to be human. This story became one of Andersen's most popular tales and went on to be published in almost 150 different languages. Today, the little mermaid is a Danish cultural icon and has been commemorated with a statue overlooking the Copenhagen harbor.

As a great admirer of classic fairy tales, Walt Disney looked to bring "The Little Mermaid" to the screen in 1940. Unfortunately, the timing and concept were not quite right and the project was abandoned. Almost 50 years later, Disney animators Ron Clements and John Musker decided to try again. They hired Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, authors of the recent Off-Broadway hit *Little Shop of Horrors*, to create the musical score for the film. *The Little Mermaid* became Disney's 28th animated feature and opened to rave reviews on November 17, 1989. Menken and Ashman were awarded the Oscar, Golden Globe, and GRAMMY for their score and the song "Under the Sea."

SYNOPSIS

Out on the open sea, Prince Eric pursues a mysterious voice despite the protests of his valet, Grimsby. Meanwhile, far beneath the waves, the crab Sebastian has prepared a concert for King Triton that will debut his youngest daughter. However, Ariel has gone with her best friend, Flounder, to the surface, where they learn about treasures of the world above from the seagull Scuttle. Deep within her lair, the sea witch Ursula and her lackey eels, Flotsam and Jetsam, bemoan their exile and plot to regain power from King Triton, using Ariel as bait.

At court, King Triton scolds Ariel for going to the surface and appoints Sebastian as her guardian. Ariel manages to slip away from him to pursue a passing ship where she encounters Prince Eric. Lightning strikes the ship, sending him overboard. Ariel saves Prince Eric from drowning, bringing him safely to shore, singing to him, and falling in love with him in the process.

When King Triton learns of Ariel's infatuation, he destroys her grotto of human treasures. Flotsam and Jetsam find Ariel in despair and lure her to the Sea Witch's lair. Ursula offers to change Ariel into a human in exchange for her voice. However, Prince Eric must kiss Ariel within three days or she will turn back into a mermaid and become Ursula's slave forever. Overcome by her dreams of the world above, Ariel makes the bargain.

Back on land, Prince Eric finds the mute Ariel and brings her home to the palace. Despite her silence, the two begin to get to know each other, through dance, and an outing to a romantic lagoon, where Flotsam and Jetsam cause a commotion that blocks their kiss. Prince Eric is still determined to find the owner of the mysterious voice, so Grimsby arranges a singing contest designed to help the Prince choose a bride. When Ariel breaks through the crowd and dances for Eric, he realizes how much he loves her and begins to propose. However, Ursula barges in as the sun sets and the spell is broken, turning Ariel back into a mermaid.

King Triton agrees to hand over his trident and take Ariel's place as Ursula's slave. When Prince Eric tries to rescue Ariel, Ursula loses control of her magic shell, and Ariel's voice is restored. Trident in hand, Ursula attempts to harness the power of the seas but creates a whirlpool that destroys her and the eels. With peace restored, King Triton realizes how much Ariel cares for Prince Eric and restores her human form. He delivers her to the world above, where Prince Eric rushes up and proposes. As Ariel answers, Prince Eric realizes it's been her voice all along.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Sea Chorus - story-telling inhabitants of the sea

Pilot - driver of Prince Eric's ship

Sailors - crew of Prince Eric's ship

Prince Eric - a prince who would rather explore the ocean than govern a kingdom

Grimsby - Prince Eric's valet

Merfolk & Sea Creatures - residents of King Triton's kingdom

Seahorse - herald in King Triton's court

King Triton - The King of the Sea and Ariel's father

Sebastian - an anxious crab and court composer for King Triton

Mersisters (Aquata, Andrina, Arista, Atina, Adella, Allana) - the daughters of King Triton and sisters of Ariel

Ariel - a little mermaid who longs to be human

Flounder - a rambunctious young fish and Ariel's best friend

Scuttle - a zany seagull and self-proclaimed expert on humans

Gulls - Scuttle's friends and fellow seagulls

Ursula - a sea witch with a vendetta

Flotsam & Jetsam - electric eels and Ursula's henchmen

Carlotta - headmistress in Prince Eric's palace

Chef Louis - head chef in Prince Eric's palace

Chefs - Chef Louis's assistants

Lagoon Animals - musical inhabitants of Prince Eric's lagoon

Princesses 1-6 - neighboring royalty, vying for Prince Eric's hand in marriage

THEATRICAL TERMS TO KNOW

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

CONTENT VOCABULARY AND TERMS

Accomplished
Barbarian
Barter
Crustacean
Fathom
Guppy
Impertinent
Lair
Nautical
Poseidon
Roustabout
Trident
Vendetta
Woebegone

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.

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. Lights may go out before the performance begins and seating is very difficult after that time.

The KiMo Theatre is a historic building. Please respect and preserve the beauty of the KiMo by not bringing food and beverages (including gum and candy) into the theater. These items are permitted in the lobby only.

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 *Little Mermaid, Jr*, which is one hour and fifteen 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.

Listen to how the music sets the moods 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.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND EXTENSION 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 Ariel becomes a human again. 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 The Little Mermaid.*
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 performance. What props or details were used to suggest specific times or settings? How did the lighting change 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, 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 onstage.
- 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 or program cover for the play.

7. *Dance:* Describe the kind of dancing in the performance. How is it different from the kinds of dancing you might know? What purposes could dance have in a play?

8. *Language Arts:*

- Choose a character that you liked and write a single 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
- 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).

Much of this material is contributed with the kind permission of Music Theatre International. This study guide was compiled by Billie J. Little, a former member of the Board of Directors for New Mexico Young Actors, Inc.; Paul Bower, former Executive Director of NMYA; and Rachel Ribeiro, current Executive Director. Revised February 2023.