



NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS

Present

Stuart Little

Fantasy adapted by **Joseph Robinette**

Based on the book by **E.B. White**

TEACHER STUDY GUIDE

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to New Mexico Young Actors production of ***Stuart Little***. We are offering this study guide to help you prepare your classes for our upcoming production at your school. Included in this guide are a historical note about the original book, a synopsis of our story, 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 after our visit. Thank you for your support of New Mexico Young Actors!

HISTORICAL NOTE

The book *Stuart Little*, now widely regarded as a classic of children's literature, was E.B. White's first book for children when it was published in 1945. White, who later went on to write *Charlotte's Web*, says that the idea for *Stuart Little* first came to him in 1926 in a dream he had on a sleeping car of a train, of a tiny boy who acted like a rat. He typed up some stories about Stuart and shared them with his 18 nieces and nephews whenever they asked him to tell them a story. Some time later, the book was published by Harper's and has gone on to receive critical and popular acclaim, and has been adapted into film, television, video game, and stage play versions.

STUART LITTLE SYNOPSIS

The play begins with Mr. and Mrs. Little welcoming the birth of their second son, Stuart. They notice immediately that he is *not* like their first son, George. He is much tinier and has a tail and whiskers. And the pleasant, shy manner of a mouse! Why, he is a mouse! But their doctor assures them that he is in perfectly sound health. They quickly learn there are certain advantages and disadvantages to having a mouse for a son. When Mrs. Little loses her wedding ring down the drain, for example, Stuart is immensely useful in retrieving it for her. But he also tends to get lost in their human-sized home, and they are *always* worried he'll go into a mousehole and never return! But overall, Stuart is a most satisfactory child, and as the Littles say, "No child is perfect!"

We follow Stuart on his adventures in and around New York City. His nemesis, the family cat, Snowbell, always tries to make things more difficult for him. But Stuart is filled with the joy of life, and also, he admits, the fear of dogs! A pack of neighborhood dogs chase him nearly all the way to Central Park, where he enjoys a sailboat race and participates as a sailor. He also meets the beautiful bird Margalo, who becomes his best friend and with whom he falls in love. Snowbell and his cat friends hatch a plot to eat Margalo, but a kind pigeon intervenes, and Margalo escapes just in time. When Stuart awakes and realizes his dearest friend Margalo has gone missing, he sets out on the adventure of his lifetime to try to find her.

Now we follow Stuart in his little red car all the way through New York City and beyond, past Connecticut, as he seeks Margalo and encounters several zany adventures, including a brief stint as a substitute teacher in a school! But will he ever find Margalo again? The audience is encouraged to use their imagination to supply the ending of the story for this little mouse and his friend.

LESSON IDEAS

Preparing Your Class for a Live Theater Experience

1. *How many of you have experienced a live theater performance? What did you see?*
 2. *What are some of the differences between seeing a play and watching television or going to a movie?*
- Theater features live onstage 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.
 - 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.
- It is easier for you (and the rest of the audience) to see and hear the performance if you stay seated and listen very carefully.
- There is no intermission during the performance, which is 40 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 after a song, dance, or joke.

Introduce your students to the following theatrical terms:

Actor	Costumes	Props
Acts/Scenes	Director	Scenery/Set
Box Office	Musical Theater	Stage
Curtain Call	Playwright	Stagehand
	Producer	Usher

Classroom Discussion and Extension Activities (Post-Performance)

Reading/Writing

- Have an E.B. White month in your class. Read aloud from *Stuart Little*, *The Trumpet of the Swan*, or *Charlotte's Web*.
- 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 *Stuart Little* was created!
- Ask students to imagine an ending to the story. Predict what happened next in the story. Write an article in which you tell the readers what happened after Stuart Little drives north. What happened to the other characters in the story? Be as specific as possible and keep with the spirit of the original story.
- Explore the relationship of protagonists and antagonists in classroom stories and draw a comparison to relationships in the play, such as Stuart Little and Snowbell; Stuart Little and Margalo; Angie and Snowbell; Mr. Little and Mrs. Little.

Vocabulary

The following are some words you will hear spoken in *Stuart Little*:

Arithmetic	Mourning	Sober
Bon Voyage	Premature	Spyglass
Cocky	Resemblance	Temperament
Contemplate	Schooner	Vessel
Fortune	Sloop	Yaw

Other Curricular Connections

- Draw a picture of a favorite scene or character.
- Draw an advertisement or program cover for the play.
- Ask the students to identify musical instruments that they heard in the play. Discuss other instruments that could have been added for greater effect.
- How did the music express the action or emotion of the story (tempo, volume, range of notes, etc.)?
- Research the mouse. Ask the students to research mice and other rodents. Identify their range, habitat, diet, social patterns, and endangerment status. Research the differences between a pet mouse and a wild mouse.
- Research the proper care of a pet mouse. What do mice need to thrive as pets? Would you like to have a mouse for a pet?
- Research the setting of the play: New York City. Locate NYC on a map. Have students plan a vacation in New York, identifying sites to visit, and creating a budget for their visit.
- Recreate a scene from the play in your classroom. Assign students to play various characters and have them work together to create short scenes from the play.
- *Stuart Little* also presents an opportunity to discuss bullying. How was Stuart bullied by Snowbell? How did Stuart face his bully? What was the end result?

INTERNET EXTENSIONS

- Listen to a read aloud of Jan Brett's *Town Mouse, Country Mouse*:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_Ceo0YOqDk

- Learn about the proper care of pet mice:

<https://www.animalhumanesociety.org/resource/mouse-care>

- Use this website for kid-friendly facts about mice:

<https://www.pestworldforkids.org/pest-guide/mice/>

- Here's another kid-friendly web resource about mice:

<https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/mouse/353498>

- Read the original review of *Stuart Little*, published in the *New York Times* on October 28, 1945:

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/lifetimes/white-little.html>

(This page includes a link to listen to actress Julie Andrews reading an excerpt from the novel!)