Introduction

Lifeline Theatre's KidSeries

Lifeline Theatre's KidSeries is committed to bringing children's literature to the stage to entertain, educate and empower both kids and adults. Our goal is to help students develop greater appreciation of literature and theatre as art forms, to excite kids about reading, as well as to teach them about various subjects within each individual show.

We encourage you to use this study guide to enrich your students' experience of Lifeline's KidSeries, and to enhance the educational value of the performance you attend.

Illinois State Board of Education Fine Arts State Goals

The Illinois State Board of Education ("ISBE") has three State Goals for the Fine Arts:

- Students should know the language of the arts.
- Through creating and performing, students should develop an understanding of how works of art are produced.
- Students should understand the role of the arts in civilizations, past and present.

This study guide and the activities included herein will help your students to reach these goals, as well as other Illinois State Goals listed throughout this guide.

The Play

The Adaptation

The play The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales was written by Bill Massolia, and is an adaptation of the book by the same name, which was written by Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Lane Smith. The play was produced by Lifeline Theatre in association with Griffin Theatre.

In this study guide, we will generally refer to Mr. Scieszka and Mr. Smith's version of The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales as "the book" or "the story," and Lifeline's The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales as "the play."

Play Synopsis

In darkness we hear Chicken Licken screaming that the sky is falling. Other characters also begin screaming that the sky is falling and that they must tell the President. Suddenly there is a loud crash, and before they can tell the President, the sky falls and squashes everyone. The lights come up on Jack, who is chopping down a magic beanstalk. After a few blows, the Little Red Hen enters, looking for someone to help her plant a kernel of wheat. The Giant is coming to eat Jack, however, so he can't help her. She accuses him of being lazy (along with the lazy dog, the lazy cat, etc.) and goes off to find someone else to help her. The Stinky Cheese Man enters next, looking for someone
to play tag with him. Jack explains that he doesn't have time to play tag, because he's got to chop down the beanstalk before the Giant can get to him. Unfortunately, Jack has been delayed too long, and the Giant makes it down the beanstalk and catches Jack. Jack decides to tell the Giant a story to keep the Giant from eating him, and he tells the story of the Frog and the Princess. For some reason, however, the story isn't the usual one we're familiar with. The Princess agrees to kiss the Frog, but when she does so, he tells her that he isn't really a prince, he's just a regular old frog. The Princess runs off in disgust.

The Giant thinks that this story is stupid, so Jack offers to tell another one: the story of Cinderumpelstiltskin. Cinderella must clean the house while her stepsisters go to the ball, which makes her very sad. While she is cleaning, though, a little man comes in and asks her to guess his name. Cinderella does not want to guess his name, even though he offers to spin straw into gold for her. "What good will gold do me?" she asks, "I need a dress to go to the ball." The little man (Rumpelstiltskin, of course) cannot get her to guess his name, so he eventually tells her, then she chases him off. When the stepsisters get home, they are very unhappy that Cinderella hasn't cleaned the house, and they don't buy her story that a little man came in offering to spin straw into gold. To punish her, they make her stay up all night cleaning the house, and they change her name to Cinderumpelstiltskin.

The Giant likes that story and wants to tell his own. It ends up a jumbled mess, however, so Jack says he will tell another one (but not before being interrupted again by the Stinky Cheese Man, who is still trying to find someone who will catch him). The next story is the Princess and the Pea, with a few changes, of course. In this version, the Prince puts a bowling ball in the mattresses in place of the pea, so that the Princess will be sure to have a bad night's sleep. After Jack finishes this story the Giant is really hungry, and says he isn't interested in hearing any more stories.

But just as the Giant is about to eat Jack, the Little Red Hen enters looking for someone to help her make bread from the wheat that she had to water, grow and harvest all by herself. They quickly get rid of her and Jack convinces the Giant to listen to another story: Little Red Running Shorts. In this version, the Wolf makes a deal with Little Red Running Shorts: if she can beat him in a race to Granny's house, he won't eat her. Well, he doesn't know it, but she's a track star and she beats him handily. When the story ends, however, the Wolf and Little Red Running Shorts decide they don't like the way Jack tells stories, and they leave together to go get lunch. The Giant is really ready to eat Jack now, but somehow Jack is able to convince the Giant to listen to another story, using one of the kids from the audience as the character of Goldilocks, since the other characters have walked out on him. Instead of a bear family, this Goldilocks ends up at the house of an elephant family, so she can't reach any of the chairs.

The Giant doesn't really like this story, and he's getting sleepy, so Jack suggests one more story, hoping to put the Giant to sleep so that he won't eat Jack. He tells the story of the Tortoise and the Rabbit. The Rabbit says he can grow his hair faster than the Tortoise can run, so they stage a race, with the Rabbit growing his hair and the Tortoise slowly moving down the road. This story puts the Giant to sleep and Jack thinks he's saved. But the Little Red Hen comes in and wakes up the Giant. She has finally made the bread (all by herself) and this gives the Giant an idea: a chicken sandwich. Jack is saved (and the Little Red Hen is lunch). The Stinky Cheese Man comes in one last time, and this time Jack agrees to chase him and they run off.
**Before the Play**

Discuss with your students proper theatre etiquette. For example, it's okay to clap and laugh, but it's not okay to talk to your neighbor. There is some audience participation in the show, so let them know they can answer any questions the actors ask them. Have students compare and contrast the difference between watching a movie and watching a play. Ask if students have been to a play before. If so, what play? What was the experience like? What do they think this particular experience will be like? If the students have not been to Lifeline before, have them think about what they might expect: a big theatre or a small one, many seats or only a few, young actors or older ones, etc.

**After the Play**

Ask students if they enjoyed the play. Based on this experience, would they like to see other plays? If they've seen plays before, how did this play compare? Was it better? Funnier? More enjoyable? What happened that they were expecting to happen? What happened that they weren't expecting? Was seeing a play a better experience than seeing a movie? Why or why not?

**Critiquing the Play**

Have the students write a review of the play. Use the attached form or have them write a paragraph or two on their own. Encourage the students to be specific about why they enjoyed a certain part of the play. If they liked a scene because it was funny, have them explain why it was funny to them, what the characters did or said that was funny, etc.

Have the students draw a picture or make a collage of their favorite scene or character. Have them show their picture to the class and explain why that scene or character was their favorite. Feel free to send the reviews and pictures to Lifeline – we enjoy reading them!

**Comparing the Story to the Play**

*Illinois State Goal 25.B.3 Students will be able to compare and contrast the elements and principles in two or more art works that share similar themes.*

**Before the Play**

Read *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* to your students, or have them read it themselves, before the production. After reading the book, choose one of the individual stories and ask the students the following questions:

1. Who are the characters in the story?
2. What happens in the beginning of the story? The middle? The end?
3. What is your favorite part of the story? Why?
4. Who is your favorite character? Why?
5. Is there a character in the story you don't like? What makes you dislike this character?
6. What do you think you will see on stage as the actors tell this story?
7. How might the play be different from the story? How might it be the same?
Beginning, Middle and End

To encourage sequential thinking, have students choose one of the stories and act out the beginning, middle and end of the story. Split the students into three groups (or more, depending on the number of students in your class) and have one group enact the beginning of the story, have the next group enact the middle, and the final group the end. Have the students watching the performances help the group to remember any parts they may have left out. Give the groups the chance to redo their performances, including any elements suggested by their classmates.

After the Play

Ask the students the following questions:

1. How were the book and the play different?
2. How were the book and the play the same?
3. What elements of the play surprised you, based on your knowledge of the book?
4. Which did you enjoy more, reading the book or watching the play?
5. What was your favorite part of the play? Was that your favorite part of the book as well?
6. Were there any characters in the book who were not in the play?
7. Were there any characters in the play that were not in the book?
8. Some parts of the play are different from the book. Why do you think the playwright added or subtracted certain parts?

Cast of Characters

There are six actors – three women and three men – in The Stinky Cheese Man. Except for the Giant, all of the actors play more than one character. The following is a list of the characters in The Stinky Cheese Man.

Jack
The Giant
The Little Red Hen
The Stinky Cheese Man
The Frog
The Princess (who kisses the Frog)
Cinderella
The Stepmother
The Two Wicked Stepsisters
Rumpelstiltskin
The Queen
The Prince
The Princess (who sleeps on a pea)
Little Red Running Shorts
The Wolf
Goldilocks

Before the Play

Ask the students the following questions:

1. How will the designers (costumes, sets, lights, props) help the actors to play their characters?
2. What do you think the actors playing the different fairy tale characters will look like?
3. What do you think the Giant will look like?
4. How will the costume designer make the actor playing the Giant look larger?
5. What do you think the actors playing fairy tale animals will look like?
6. What do you think the actors playing animals will do with their voices to make themselves sound like the animals they are playing?
7. When you watch the play, see if you can figure out which characters each actor plays.

After the Play

Ask the students the following questions:

1. In what ways are the characters different in the play than in the book?
2. In what ways are the characters the same in both the book and the play?
3. Do you think it was difficult for the actors to play more than one part? Why or why not?
4. How did the designers help the actors to play their parts?
5. The costume designer used drywall stilts to make the Giant look tall. Do you think it was hard for the actor to walk in them? Why or why not?
6. What parts of the Little Red Hen's costume made her look like a chicken? [Feather tail; stuffing in costume to make her look round]
7. How did the actor move so that she looked like a chicken?

Creating a Character

**Illinois State Goal 26.A.2b Students will be able to describe various ways the body, mind and voice are used with acting, scripting and staging processes to create or perform drama/theatre.**

Actors use their bodies and their voices to create characters like kings and queens, wolves and frogs, princesses and giants.

1. How do the actors use their voices and their bodies to show which characters they're playing?
2. How do the costumes help the actors to play their parts?
3. What do the actors do with their voices and bodies to indicate they are playing people who are older, younger, or in other ways different from themselves?
4. What sort of props do the actors use to help them create their characters? [The King and Queen have crowns; Jack has an ax; etc.]
5. What words do the characters say that makes you know what character they are? [The Little Red Hen says "bawk bawk bawk"; the Giant says "Fee Fi Fo Fum"]

Have students practice using just their bodies and voices to create the different characters in the story. Have students choose character traits that make sense for each character—for example, a King or a Princess moves differently from a boy like Jack. Have a student come to the front of the room and move as if she is a character from the play. Have the class guess which character it is. Have them describe how she moved in words (rather than by saying "she moved like this" and showing it with their bodies) and how that helped them to guess which character she was playing. Play follow the leader, with the class moving or shaping their bodies the same way the student playing the character does.
Jobs in the Theatre

**Illinois State Goal 27.A.3a** Students will be able to identify and describe careers and jobs in and among the arts.

When we create a play at Lifeline, we create a community of artists working together to make a complete production. The following is a list of people who helped to create *The Stinky Cheese Man*:

- **Playwright/Adaptor/Author** - writes the play
- **Director** - directs the play: makes decisions about costumes, lights, sets, etc.; gives actors their blocking (where to go on stage)
- **Lighting Designer** - designs and hangs the lights for the show; designs the light cues (when to change the lights)
- **Set and Props Designer** - designs and builds the scenery and props for the show
- **Sound Designer** - designs and records the background music and sound effects for the show
- **Costume Designer** - designs and makes the costumes for the show
- **Stage Manager** - helps the director during rehearsals; sets props and scenery before each performance; runs the sound and lights during the performance
- **Actors** - perform the play

**Before the play**, ask students to be particularly observant during the performance for the parts of the show that are done by the various people listed above.

**After the play**, ask the students the following questions:

1. How did the costume designer make the actors look like the characters they were playing?
2. How did the set designer and the lighting designer create the different places where the play takes place?
3. Why do you think the sound designer chose the sound effects he did? How did those sound effects help you to understand what was happening in the play (i.e., where the scenes were taking place, what was happening in the scenes)?
4. What sorts of sound effects did you hear during the play?
5. How did those sound effects tell you what was happening that you couldn't see? [A crash telling you that Cinderella had broken a plate; a whistle noise to indicate the sky is falling]
6. The Giant is wearing stilts (which are usually used by drywall installers). What other ways could the designers have made the actor playing the Giant look bigger than he is?
7. What costume items help to make the Frog look like a frog? [Goggles, green flippers]
8. How did the set designer create the stack of mattresses in the Princess and the Pea section? [Pieces of fabric woven between ropes and suspended from a ladder]
9. How did the set designer create the beanstalk? [Fabric tied around a rope]
10. What other ways could the set designer have created the beanstalk and the mattresses?
11. Did you have a favorite costume in the show? Which one? Why was it your favorite?
Theatre Job Application Letter

Ask the students which job they would like to have in the theatre. Have the students write a job application letter to Lifeline Theatre for the job they would like to do. Have them include what the job is, why they would be good at that job, what qualifications or past experience they have (this can be real or made-up experience), and why they want to do that job. Stress good penmanship in this activity, since they are applying for a job and want to make a good impression on the person reading the letter.

The Playwright

The book The Stinky Cheese Man is a collection of stories. How did the adaptor connect the stories in the play The Stinky Cheese Man in a way that is different from the book? [Jack is telling stories to the Giant, rather than acting as simply a narrator, as he does in the book.] Some of the stories in the play are expanded from the stories in the book. Other stories from the book are shorter in the play. How is each story different in the play than it is in the book? Which stories in the play are self-contained, and which stories are stretched out over the course of the play? [The stretched-out stories are the Little Red Hen, the Stinky Cheese Man and Jack's story.]

What other ways could the stories have been put together in the play? Have students create an outline in which they connect the stories in their own way. Encourage them to change the order of the stories, to choose a different character to be the narrator (the Stinky Cheese Man, the Red Hen, the Giant), or to find another way to connect the stories without using a narrator.

The Fine Arts

Illinois State Goal 25.B.2 Students will be able to understand how elements and principles combine within an art form to express ideas.

The Illinois State Board of Education defines four fine arts in its State Goals for Arts Education: Visual Arts, Drama, Dance and Music. The Stinky Cheese Man makes use of three of the four fine arts:

Visual Arts: scene painting; sculpture (props, three-dimensional set pieces); costumes
Drama: acting; script; characterization
Music: background scoring

Have students identify how the three fine arts are used in The Stinky Cheese Man. How would the play be different without the background music? Without the sets? Which elements of the three fine arts above are absolutely necessary to tell the story and which elements could be left out? How would the play have been different if it were a musical? What styles of music might you use to tell the story?

Have the students identify how the fine arts are combined in other entertainment (dance concerts, movies, TV, music videos). Which of the fine arts do they prefer? Why? Have students identify places in their town or city where they can see or experience each of the four fine arts.
Have the students plan out and perform an all-dance performance of *The Stinky Cheese Man*. Have them tell the story through pictures only (painting or drawing). Have them tell the story of *The Stinky Cheese Man* by writing song lyrics to a tune they already know (a folk song, popular song, nursery rhyme).

**Favorite Fairy or Folk Tale**

Have students identify their favorite folk or fairy tales. Have a few of the students tell the class the plot of their favorite story in a few sentences. If you have students who grew up in other countries, or whose parents are from other countries, encourage those students to tell stories from their cultural traditions. Discuss how these stories are different or similar to the fairy or folk tales children grow up with here in the United States. After telling their stories, have the students answer these questions:

1. Who are the characters in this fairy or folk tale?
2. What is the moral of the tale?
3. What values are represented in this tale?
4. Are these values important today or were they more important when the story was first written or told?

The stories in *The Stinky Cheese Man* are often referred to as "fractured fairy tales," in that they have been changed to make them funny and to have endings other than what we expect. Have students write a new version of their favorite folk or fairy tale that changes the ending. Alternately, have the students combine two stories, as is done in the Cinderumpelstiltskin story. Choose students to direct a small group of their classmates in a retelling of the story, either in its original setting or by modernizing or changing the story in some other way. This activity can be done with several small groups creating their stories at the same time, and then inviting them up group by group to perform for the rest of the class.

Have students identify and bring in other examples of fractured fairy tales (i.e., Jon Scieszka's book *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, television parodies of fairy tales on Sesame Street, movies featuring changed fairy tales, etc.). Have students compare the revised versions to the originals. Why did the creators make the changes? To be funny? To give the story a different message? What do you like or dislike about the changes?

**Comments**

Please feel free to fill out the attached comment form and return it to Lifeline. We are always trying to make our shows and educational materials better, and your comments can help us to do that. Thank you for attending *The Stinky Cheese Man*, and please come back again soon!
Review of *The Stinky Cheese Man*

By: ________________________________

I give this play (circle the number of stars): ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

My favorite part of the play was__________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

I liked this part of the play because______________________________________

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

My favorite character was______________________________________________

He/she was my favorite because__________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

I think everyone should go see this play because__________________________

______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
Teacher Comment Form

Please fill out as much (or as little) of this comment form as you would like. When you are finished, please either: 1) mail it to Erica Foster, Lifeline Theatre, 6912 North Glenwood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60626; 2) fax it to 773-761-4582; or 3) bring it with you when you come to see the performance. Thank you for your time!

School: ________________________ Grade Level: _____ Number of Students: ___

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (ten being the best), how would you rate the performance of The Stinky Cheese Man? ____________________________

2. On a scale of 1 to 10 (ten being the best), how would you rate the study guide for The Stinky Cheese Man? ____________________________

3. What were some words your students used to describe the play? ____________________________

4. Would you want to bring your students to another performance at Lifeline? Yes  No

5. Why or why not? ____________________________

6. Which activities in the study guide were most beneficial to your students? ________

7. How did your students benefit from these activities? (If possible, please give specific examples.) ____________________________

8. What could we do to improve the study guide or our productions? ________

9. Are there any other books you would like to see Lifeline adapt? ________